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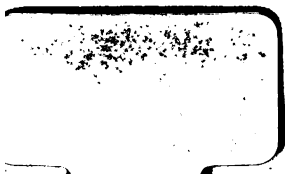
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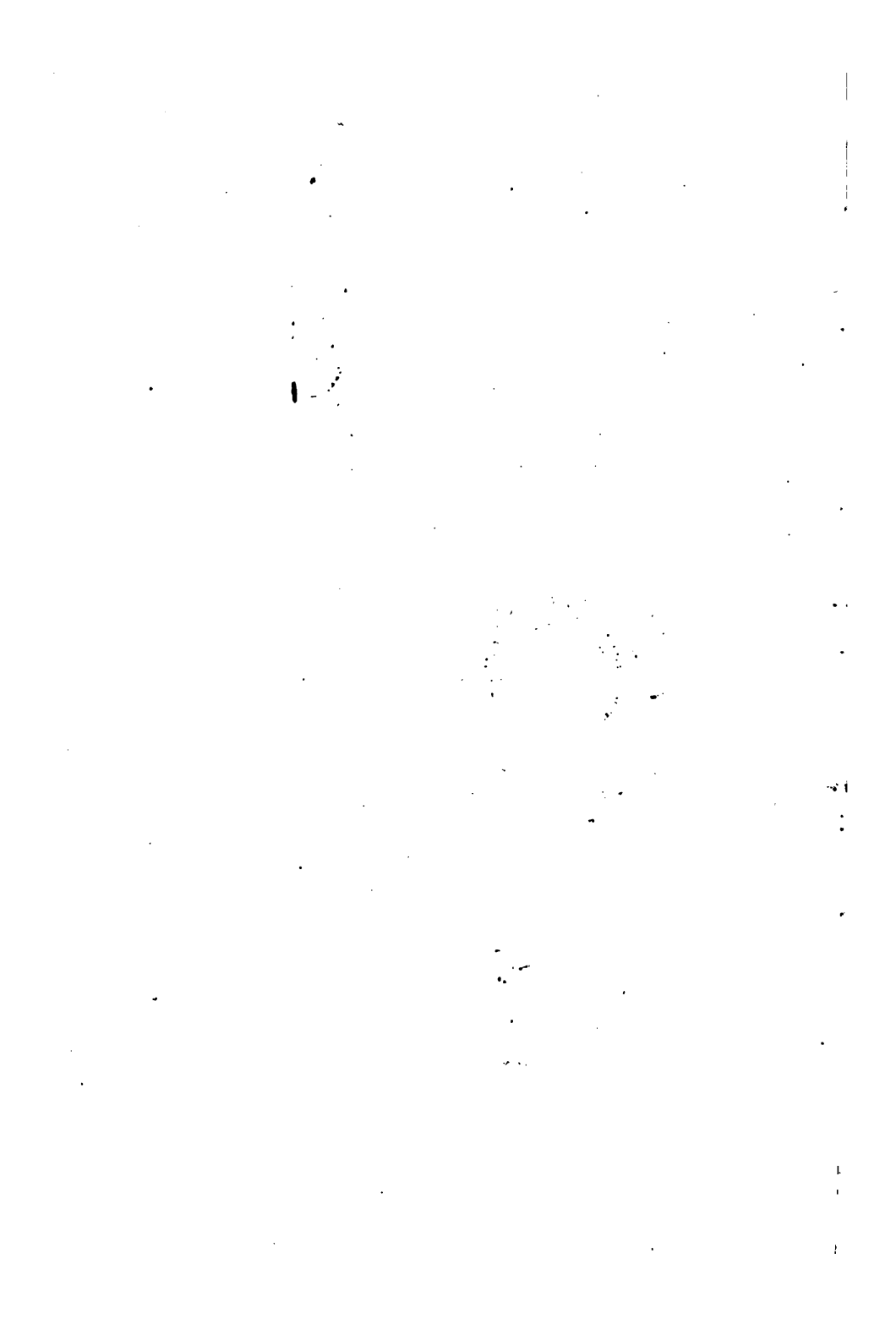
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ROBERT AINSLEIGH

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.



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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE DIVISION OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES

THE DIVISION OF THE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ROBERT AINSLEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOLT ABOUT TO FALL.

WERE this a record of private griefs, I might dwell long upon the desolation of spirit and unutterable anguish of heart which followed the receipt of those tidings that gave the death-blow to all my hopes; and, Heaven knows, these had seemed faint and feeble enough since my cruel marriage and more cruel exile. I had lost all. Henceforth nothing was left me in the past; and I looked forward to the unknown future from a present standpoint as desolate as it is possible for the mind of man to conceive.

Yet, as I pen these lines, and recall the dull despair of those days, I think with shame of my

ingratitude to the one friend whom God had raised up for me in this unknown world, and my impious forgetfulness of the mercy that had secured me so kind and powerful a protector. If my situation was desolate in spite of Mr. Howell's friendship, what would my state have been without that supreme advantage? By this gentleman I had been rescued from a crew of wretches, who were, for the most part, the very refuse and sweepings of English gaols, and elevated to a position of companionship. The friendship of so respectable a gentleman won for me other acquaintances, and I soon occupied an established position amongst the gentlemen of the factory. Of the life which these gentlemen and their families enjoyed I will say nothing, save that to them it seemed a pleasant one. My own troubles unfitted me for such agreeable dissipations as prevailed among them, and I preferred the solitude of my office to the most boisterous dinner-party in Calcutta. The day came when the tragic and exciting incidents of public life blunted the keen edge of individual sorrow, and I was better able to appreciate the advantages I had derived from the happy chance that threw me across Mr. Holwell's pathway. But for more than a year after my receipt of Mr.

Swinfen's letter I was able to take comfort from nothing; and though I still performed my daily round of duty, and contrived to give satisfaction to my employer, the pleasure and interest which I had hitherto felt in my work had completely left me.

The years which elapsed between the autumn of 1753 and the summer of '56 were years of comparative tranquillity; and before that memorable summer came, we had seen the reduction of French power in the East by means of French folly, cowardice, and ignorance in the West. Enemy to my country though he was, false as he had shown himself in his violation of the treaty of Madras, I cannot withhold my pity from that daring and ambitious statesman, Joseph Francis Dupleix, when I consider the ignoble treatment he received from the government he had served so well.

While the rival powers on the coast of Coromandel were fighting for the supremacy of their chosen native rulers, and disputing the validity of titles and grants given by the shadowy court of Delhi, where the Mogul himself was but a usurper of very recent date, the English Company at home pestered the Government with complaints that, despite a treaty

of peace between the two nations, they were harassed by a distressing and dangerous war, produced by the ambition of the French governor. Nor were the French themselves better satisfied with the conduct of their Indian affairs. Too remote from the seat of war to be affected by the glories of success, they considered only the expense and loss entailed by those triumphs, and were unable to appreciate the future advantages which those struggles were intended to secure. Dupleix was too successful a man to be without enemies. These accused him of wasting the French Company's money upon ambitious wars ; and France, after leaving this bold and faithful servant, inefficiently supported, to extend her dominions and maintain her army by the outlay of his private fortune, determined upon repudiating his claim for repayment and breaking him altogether.

At a conference which took place in London between the representatives of the French and British Governments, the French Ministry consented to recall Dupleix, and to send commissioners to India for the settlement of all differences between the two nations. Thus it happened that Monsieur Godcheu, a stranger to affairs in the East, was permitted to supersede the man who had first taught Moorish

power to bow before European arms, and who had won for his country a name of might throughout the length and breadth of the Deccan. Injustice so glaring was second only to that which had flung De la Bourdonnais into a cell of the Bastille; and I doubt not that in the hour of his own misfortunes the Governor of Pondicherry remembered his underhand share in the downfall of his blameless rival.

Negotiations between M. Godcheu and Mr. Saunders, the English Governor of Madras, resulted in extraordinary concessions on the part of the French. That nation, thanks to the ambition of Dupleix and the prowess of Bussy, were now masters of the sea-coast of Coromandel and Orixá; but this advantage, together with many others, was precipitately resigned by the French Company in the general desire for peace.

While evil fortune thus overtook Dupleix, his happier enemy, Clive, was in London, fêted by an admiring public, and gratified by the gift of a diamond-hilted sword, worth five hundred pounds, from the Court of Directors, which he, however, generously refused to receive unless a testimonial of equal value were presented to his friend and com-

manding officer, Colonel Lawrence, to whose liberal encouragement he owed so much of his success.

In the November of '55, the hero of Arcot returned to India as Governor of Fort St. David, bearing a commission as lieutenant-colonel in the British army, which had been obtained for him from His Majesty's Government by the Court of Directors, anxious to prevent those quarrels about rank between the King's and Company's officers which had so often obstructed the progress of affairs.

Instead of at once proceeding to his new Government, Colonel Clive landed at Bombay, where he found Admiral Watson and a little fleet, which had been prudently despatched from England at the time of the conference between the French and English Companies. Assisted by the admiral, Clive attacked and routed a famous pirate, called Angria, who, with his father before him, had been the scourge and terror of this coast for the last half century. This Morattoe rascal's stronghold of Gheria Colonel Clive razed to the ground on the 18th of February, '56, on which occasion the British forces shared ten lacs of rupees by way of plunder.

This was the last event of importance on the western coast before the revolution which overtook

Bengal. Here a false security, or rather, perhaps, an habitual distaste for action or exertion of any kind, on the part of the chief authorities, civil and military, had prevailed ever since the fear of Morattoo invasion had ceased to alarm the native and English inhabitants of the settlement. Every species of neglect had been practised. The defences of fort and city were in a dilapidated and almost useless condition. In all the arsenal there was scarce a carriage that would bear a gun; while fifty-five cannon, eighteen- and twenty-four-pounders, sent out from England in '53, had lain ever since neglected beneath the walls. Nor had the orders of the Directors at home been better attended to with regard to the drilling and military training of the militia. These, though entirely untaught, were hardly more ignorant than the meagre garrison, not one in ten among whom had ever seen a musket fired in earnest.

This was our condition at Fort William when the tidings of Allaverdy's approaching death came upon us. The spirit of the grand old Tartar chief was fading out amidst a scene of intrigue and treachery—the last act in that drama of falsehood and ambition which is for ever being enacted in this Eastern world.

On the one side, Allaverdy's dying eyes beheld

his beloved grand-nephew, Mirza Mahmud, the adopted child of his old age, dear to him as an only son, and whom he had installed as his successor two years before, with the Moorish name of Serauje-ad-Doulah, or the Lamp of Riches ; who was afterwards known as Suraja Doulah, by which title he made himself infamously renowned to all time. On the other side, the deathbed of the old Nabob was watched by his daughter—a woman of more than doubtful character, who had been married to her cousin, Shawamut Jung, and was now a childless widow.*

There now remained but one possible pretender to the sovereignty of Bengal, and this was a child of two years old, the orphan son of Suraja Doulah's younger brother. This infant's father had been adopted by the late Shawamut Jung, and the baby pretender was now in the hands of Allaverdy's daughter, the Begum, who had succeeded to her husband's treasures, and towards whom Suraja Doulah looked with the eye of hate and suspicion.

The person who exercised most influence over the Begum was a Gentoo called Raja Bullub, who had been Duan, or prime minister, to her husband. Suraja Doulah had given this man a taste of his quality,

* See Appendix, Note B, at end of Vol. III.

having seized upon him, and, by imprisonment and other cruelties, endeavoured to force from him a full account of Shawamut Jung's treasures. This the faithful Gentoo resolutely refused, and was by-and-by set at liberty by the influence of his mistress, who, as Allaverdy's daughter, had some power at court.

Thus did matters stand at Muxadavad, the capital of Bengal,* when the imminence of the Nabob's end brought affairs to a crisis. Raja Bullub, trembling for the safety of his treasures at Dacca, determined to remove with his worldly wealth and his family to a place of safety. But to effect this he was obliged to screen his real motives under a pretended access of piety. He therefore wrote to Mr. Watts, the chief of our English factory at Cassimbazar, hard by Muxadavad, informing him that his family were going from Dacca to worship at Juggernaut, and would take Calcutta on their way, at which settlement he entreated their favourable reception.

In compliance with this request Mr. Watts wrote to our president at Calcutta, and to Mr. Manningham, his junior in command. These letters arrived on the evening of the 18th of March, and during the

* Now called Moorshedabad.

absence of the president. They had but just reached Calcutta when Kissendass, the eldest son of Raja Bullub, and the rest of the family, landed from the little fleet of boats that had conveyed them from Dacca. There was brief leisure for consideration, and the travellers were received with all possible courtesy.

Mr. Holwell shook his head doubtfully when his people brought him the news of this unexpected arrival, as he and I lounged in an open veranda in the cool of the evening.

‘I don’t like such visitors, Bob,’ he said gravely; ‘and yet I own it would be awkward to refuse them hospitality. In Oriental politics it is hard to know what turn events may take. If the Begum, Shawamut Jung’s widow, should succeed in getting her adopted brat proclaimed Nabob—and we know that Suraja Doulah is heartily detested by all classes—it would be well for the English to have secured her favour. But if, on the other hand, Suraja Doulah holds his own—which is more likely, since he has his paw upon the old Nabob’s treasury, and sticks at nothing in the way of assassination—we shall mortally offend him by anything like protection of these Gentoos. Would to Heaven we had better defences,

Bob, and a more energetic garrison ! for it strikes me this settlement is about as safe as a village built under the shadow of Vesuvius, or a chateau on the slope of Etna.'

It was on the day after this arrival that Omichund, the Gentoo merchant, came to wait upon my patron. This man's revenues had been considerably diminished during the last three years by the Company's withdrawal of the privileges he had so long enjoyed ; and to a mind so avaricious even the possession of vast wealth would fail to atone for this diminution of income. The old man's influence had also been lessened, and his pride humiliated by the Company's ceasing to employ him as a mediator at the Durbar ; and this, I doubt not, he felt no less keenly than his more substantial loss.

His manner was even more servile than usual ; but I fancied I detected a sinister light in his eyes as he complimented Mr. Holwell, who gratified him with a piece of betel-nut wrapped in a leaf called pawn, a kind of sweetmeat much affected by the natives, and the interchange of which is a token of friendship.

Omichund had heard of our guests' arrival, and began at once to discuss the subject.

'Company Sahib do well to receive Kissendass,'

he said. 'Raja Bullub, the father of Kissendass, is great friends with Begum Saheb—much very great friends. Wicked people say Begum Saheb is too much friends with Raja Bullub; but Omichund is no man to believe lies. If Begum Saheb and the little child get into power, it will be good for the English Company; but if not——'

He stopped, and shook his head ominously, with his shining black eyes fixed on my patron's face.

'If not, what?' asked Mr. Holwell impatiently.

'What should Omichund know, saheb?' replied the old man with a crafty smile; 'Omichund is less than no one. Company Saheb has not employed him at the Durbar these many years. His honourable masters have left off to trust to him. But he is an old man, and has much experience, and eyes that see and ears that hear. He has heard something.'

'What, man?' cried Mr. Holwell; 'for Heaven's sake don't stand croaking there like a bird of evil omen. Speak, raven!'

'I have heard what the Soubah Allaverdy said to his great-nephew, Suraja Doulah, not three days ago,' said Omichund solemnly. 'He has been long dying, the old Soubah, but the hour is near. Siva, the destroyer, has his hand outstretched to seize the

old Mahometan, and he will go to the lower hell of darkness with the spirits that know not Bramah. Not three days ago the old man sent for his adopted son, and it seemed that he had an unnatural strength lent him to enable him to give his last counsels to his heir. "Lamp of Riches, light of my soul," he said to Suraja, "I leave you a mission. It is to sweep the European off the face of Hindostan. They are a dangerous people, my son. They make quarrels between the Hindoo kings, and profit by the strifes they raise. They make pretences, to seize and plunder the goods of the rulers of the south; and think not they will leave you free from their depredations. The most dangerous of all are the English. I myself would have freed you from this danger, had Allah lengthened my days. The work, my son, must now be yours. The power of the English is great; they have lately reduced Angria, and possessed themselves of his country. Suffer them not to have fortifications or soldiers: if you do, the country is not yours."

Mr. Holwell affected to receive Omichund's information with entire equanimity; but when the old man had paid his farewell compliments and departed, I quickly saw that my patron was somewhat alarmed. I asked him whether it was not so; and he answered

me, after his wont, with perfect frankness. He had, indeed, by this time, elevated me to a position of confidence and friendship second only to that of a son.

‘Yes, Robert,’ he said, ‘I do fear Suraja Doulah. There is no tyrant so cruel, no despot so murderous, as a coward. Allaverdy was capable of hellish treachery, but he was a brave man. When the hour of extreme peril arose, he cared not with what weapon he destroyed his enemy; but he did not war against possible antagonists. To be suspected by Suraja Doulah is to be doomed. He feared the Deputy-governor of Dacca, and midnight assassins removed the object of his fear. He feared Hassein Coolly Khan, and Hassein Coolly was slaughtered at noon-tide in the streets of the city. In his two uncles he saw probable opponents; both are dead. If he fears the English, Heaven protect us against a foe so secret and so deadly; for we have not the power to protect ourselves. From the sleep which we have slept for the last ten years, nothing short of a thunderclap will awaken us. It is quite possible the bolt is about to fall.’

In little more than a month after this interview, on the 9th of April, 1756, the Nabob Allaverdy died; and about the same date came a second letter from

Mr. Watts of Cassimbazar, recommending that Raja Bullub's family should no longer receive protection in Calcutta, as affairs were now very doubtful.

This prudent recommendation was unattended to, in spite of Mr. Holwell's remonstrances with his seniors in Council. It seemed, indeed, as if these gentlemen were bent upon inviting the ruin which was so soon to overtake them.

A private letter from Mr. Watts arrived about the same time, to warn our president that Suraja Doulah had spies at Calcutta; that the weakness of its fortifications and garrison was the common talk of the Durbar, nay even of the very streets and market-places of Muxadavad; and that it behoved us to prevent such spies carrying their information daily to the Soubah's council-chamber.

This letter was communicated by the president to Mr. Holwell, as Zemindar, who gave immediate orders at all the guarded landing-places that no one should be permitted to land or enter the town without a passport from him. Several suspected persons were arrested, and turned out of the place, and none admitted without a strict examination. My own suspicions pointed to a far more important person than any among those who were thus arrested.

The English Company had made a powerful enemy for themselves in Omichund, whose pretended friendship I could not doubt was but a mask to hide his real feelings. A Hindoo, passionately fond of money, crafty, proud, and subtle, was of all created beings the least likely patiently to endure an injury such as the Company had inflicted upon him. We knew him to have ready access to the Durbar. Where else need we look for spies, when this hidden foe had the ear of the tyrant?

I ventured to hint my suspicions to my patron, and found that his ideas on the subject fully coincided with my own.

Within a few days of Suraja Doulah's accession, Omichund came to Mr. Holwell to inform him that Narain Sing, whose brother occupied a post of some importance about the person of the new Nabob, had got into Calcutta in the disguise of a European pedlar, and was at Omichund's house, where he awaited my patron's permission to visit him. He brought a perwannah, or order, from the Nabob, demanding that Raja Bullub's family should be immediately given up. In the absence of the president and his second in authority, Mr. Holwell

felt himself bound to receive this messenger. He came accordingly, and was entertained with all due respect; but when he tendered his official document, Mr. Holwell prudently declined to receive it in the absence of the president, to whom the paper was addressed. By this means time was gained for deliberation; and on the president's return, which occurred the next morning, a council was immediately held to decide this important question. My patron had in the meantime discovered that the Nabob's messenger had been smuggled into the place by the agency of Omichund—another suspicious fact against this venerable Gentoo.

The authorities of Calcutta now found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. The fortune of the hour was yet undecided. Should the Begum's cause prosper, it would be fatal to offend her favourites: should she fail, it would be ruin to have defied Suraja Doulah.

In this difficulty the council decided that as Narain Sing had stolen like a thief into the settlement, his perwannah should not be received, and he was turned out of Calcutta with contumely by unwise and insolent subordinates, who entertained themselves at the spy's expense. A letter from the

president to Mr. Watts at Cassimbazar explained, and in a manner apologised for, this treatment.

Not long were we suffered to remain ignorant of the mistake we had made. Allaverdy's widow, desirous of peace, prevailed upon her daughter to acknowledge Suraja Doulah, which concession was no sooner made than Suraja put the Begum under lock and key, and at once possessed himself of her palaces and treasures, together with the person of the baby pretender. Thus in a few hours perished all our hopes of favour from the family of Raja Bullub.

Nor was the new Nabob slow to show us that we had little to expect from his friendship. Tidings from home of a breach between England and France had at last aroused us from our torpor; and workmen were employed in repairing the parapet and embrasures of the fort, together with the gun-carriages—all sorely in need of reparation.

This most necessary work—so imprudently deferred to the hour of imminent danger—was but half done, when the president received a perwannah from the Nabob, to the effect that he had been informed we were building a wall and digging a large ditch round the town of Calcutta, and

commanding us to desist at once from such works.

The president immediately replied, that we had dug no ditch since the invasion of the Morattoes; that in the prospect of a war between France and England, we were anxious to prevent the possibility of such a calamity as that which had some years before overtaken our countrymen at Madras; and for this end we were repairing our line of guns to the water-side.

The result of this hasty answer was fatal. A war between the French and English was the very danger this craven-hearted prince had been taught to dread.

After this the authorities at Calcutta endeavoured to soothe the Nabob's wrath with some slight concessions, and even went so far as to destroy some of our few defences; but without avail. Suraja Doulah still obstinately demanded that we should throw down a wall we had never built, and fill up a ditch that had not been dug.

On the 6th of June came rumours of calamity. The Company's factory and fort at Cassimbazar had been invested by the Nabob, to whom Mr. Watts had surrendered after a brief parley. With a garrison of

less than fifty men, a deficiency of ammunition, and but a few small cannon, all more or less out of repair, it would indeed have needed the genius of a Clive to encounter so powerful a besieger. Yet had the garrison but held out for ever so short a period, the time gained would have been invaluable to us at Calcutta ; since, had the Nabob's march been deferred but a few days, the season of heavy rains would have commenced, and the country have become almost impassable for troops and cannon.

So deeply did Ensign Elliot, the commanding officer at Cassimbazar, feel the humiliation of this tame surrender, that he shot himself through the head, whereby at least he escaped the fate of his men, who were all put in irons and marched off to the common gaol at Muxadavad. So much clemency had we to expect from the new Nabob.

Dark was the gloom which now brooded over Calcutta. In every countenance appeared the common expectation of a swift-approaching peril. With some it took the form of fear, and many a pale face was to be seen in the streets and on the fort, for Suraja Doulah had the reputation of being a man to whom cruelty was a favourite pastime : and who could tell what hellish ingenuity he

might exercise to make the cup of death unnaturally bitter?

With some bold spirits, however, this crisis was a period of feverish excitement. Warriors by nature, these poor untutored heroes sniffed the scent of battle from afar, and were glad.

Amongst these was Philip Hay. I talked with him after the evil tidings had come from Cassimbazar, and found him in excellent spirits. However bitterly I had suffered from this man, there were times when I was compelled to admire his marvellous equanimity of temper. He had borne his dreary life during the last four years with consummate cheerfulness, and had ingratiated himself into the favour of his officers, from whom he had speedily picked up any military knowledge they were willing to impart. His good conduct had advanced him from the rank of a private to that of corporal, in which position he was more than a match for the truculent Irish sergeant, Mr. O'Blagg. Between Hay and myself friendly relations had steadily continued, despite our altered positions. He had seen my good fortune without envy—nay, indeed, I believe with a lazy kind of satisfaction, as releasing his conscience from the burden of my ruin. He could now rub

his hands cheerily, and say, 'Egad, Bob, 'tis the old Scripture story of Joseph and his brethren over again. My selling you into slavery has made your fortune.'

Meanwhile, I on my part had never omitted to do him a service when the opportunity arose; and though my small influence had not gained him much promotion, it had secured him some trifling benefits, for which he was needlessly grateful.

I found him lounging on one of the batteries, and looking up the Hooghly with an eager expression in his eyes.

'Well, Bob,' he cried as I approached, 'I think we are near the end of this dead calm. Be sure the taking of Cassimbazar was but the first act in a stirring tragedy, and we shall soon hear the thunder of the Nabob's guns.'

'I think the French have taught these Eastern tyrants not to count too much upon their ponderous artillery, which they can but fire once in a quarter of an hour. It was said in the Deccan the other day that Bussy's musketry drew smoke from the Morattoes' breasts, and sacrificed hecatombs upon the fire-altars of the French. Depend upon it, they

have begun to awaken to the power of European artillery.'

'But not such artillery as ours, Bob. The Nabob knows our strength to a gun, and knows he can crush us; and, what is more, means to do it, Mr. Robert Ainsleigh. So much the better, say I. Welcome the struggle. Let us not walk meekly into this Indian lion's jaws, like those poor cravens of Cassimbazar. Give us a hard fight and a bloody death, if needs be, so that history may record how one handful of Englishmen were found to defy the Eastern tiger. Do you know what I would do if I were commandant of the fort?'

'I cannot conceive what original piece of strategy your heroic genius might devise.'

'I would collect every ounce of powder we could scrape together—and the Lord knows it would not be much—in the cellars below the fort, and blow fort, factory, and Englishmen to the stars, before the Nabob's black devils should enter our gates.'

'It would be a more heroic ending than the capitulation of Madras, and hardly a more costly one, and as a last resource might fairly be tried. But when we have used all our gunpowder in defending

ourselves, we shall not have the means for a public suicide. Alas! Phil, I fear a more ignoble end awaits the English in Bengal!’

Upon this we parted, with a friendly nod of farewell; I being obliged to return to my patron’s house, where my services might at any time be wanted to copy or translate a letter, or for some other small business detail. Mr. Holwell was now constantly backwards and forwards between his house and the council-chamber, where all the excitement of expectation and uncertainty prevailed.

Now that danger was at our very doors, there was at least some show of activity. Letters demanding reinforcements were despatched to Madras and Bombay, but with little or no hope that help could reach us from either station in time, since the sea was closed by the south monsoon for the present, and the journey by land was the work of a month. Nor did we shrink from the humiliation of asking nearer aid from the French and Dutch; only to meet with contumely and disappointment from both. We had no resource, therefore, but in our own feeble numbers. These, augmented by militia, amounted to scarce five hundred men, two-thirds of whom were Topases, Armenians, and Portuguese inhabitants,

of whose temper or constancy we knew nothing. Our Indian matchlock-men were increased to fifteen hundred, and we now lost no time in storing provisions and erecting such works of defence as we were capable of constructing at so short a notice.

CHAPTER II.

TARA.

Now was enacted a tragic drama, in which I was destined to play a strange part. Nearly a week had gone by since the fatal news from Cassimbazar. The Nabob and his army were on the road to Calcutta, advancing with so impatient a haste on the part of their vengeful master that many of the troops fell a sacrifice to the fierceness of an almost tropical sun. During this interval the president and Mr. Holwell had kept a sharp watch upon the movements of Omichund, who was now suspected as the hidden instigator of all this mischief. They did not watch in vain. On the 13th of June a letter was intercepted, addressed to Omichund by the Nabob's chief spy, and advising him at once to place his treasures and effects beyond the reach of danger.

This was considered decisive evidence of the Gentoo merchant's perfidy. As he happened,

unluckily for himself, to visit the president shortly after the stoppage of this letter—having probably heard of the circumstance by one of those side-winds of treachery which are ever blowing about in the East—he was at once placed under arrest and confined in the fort, while a guard of twenty men were despatched to his house to prevent the removal of his effects.

With this sinister event closed the 14th of June. On the evening of the 15th I left my office, where I had been working busily all day under my employer's direction, sorting and arranging papers in sealed packets, in readiness for their sudden removal. I was relieved by the change from the tropical heat of the day, which even our wetted blinds could not exclude, to the comparative coolness of evening, and strolled along the streets of Calcutta in a listless, mechanical way, thinking of our desperate position, and imagining the contrast between the sluggish quiet of the half-built town—where vagabond dogs were squabbling in the gutter and noisy cranes performing their work of scavengers, and here and there a lazy Gentoo shuffling from his shop to a neighbour's, or a dirty fakir squatting on the muddy path, absorbed in his pretended devotions—with the

dread scene of warfare that must ere long be enacted in those very streets.

In such an idle meditative mood I walked a distance of three miles from the fort, and by-and-by found myself near Mr. Omichund's house, that splendid habitation which I had once entered at a time of festival, and the image of which had ever since remained imprinted on my mind as the picture of some fairy palace in the tales of the *Arabian Nights*. Under what an altered aspect was I now to behold it!

A great crowd had gathered round the gilded gates, and a hundred voices rent the air in a confused clamour as I drew near. Nor was the excitement of the crowd without sufficient cause. A volume of flame and smoke had just burst from the open roof of the quadrangle, and loud and shrill from every lip arose the cry of "fire!"

I asked one of the bystanders how the fire had arisen.

'I know not, saheb,' the man replied in Bengalee; 'there has been a fight between Omichund's servants—Omichund has many servants, three hundred servants—and the Company saheb's guards, and there has been much people killed. Hazarimull,

Omichund's brother, and steward of his house, had hidden himself in the women's apartments, and the Company's guards went to seize him.'

The flame and smoke mounted higher from the open roof, and above the clamour of the crowd I heard the agonized shrieks of women within the burning house.

'Great God! the women are there,' I cried.

'Yes,' the Gentoo answered coolly, 'much women in the house—Omichund's daughters and grand-daughters. They all live in the house.'

I remembered those latticed apartments which Mr. Holwell had pointed out to me on the night of the natch, and without another thought I broke through the passive crowd, whose shrill exclamations in Bengalee sounded like the chatter of a flock of parrots, and entered the central hall of the house.

Happily the fire had but just broken out, for in Calcutta this element of destruction is doubly fearful, so swift is the progress of the flames where there is so little to check them. But though the fire had yet attacked only one corner of the gallery, a universal scene of ruin met my gaze. The fray had been a severe one, many being wounded on each

side; and it is only to be wondered that our own guard were not slaughtered to a man, since the odds were fifteen to one against them.

By the time I made my way into the centre of the court, those piercing shrieks of terror-stricken women which I had heard without the gate had subsided, or were smothered by the groans and execrations of the peons, or native servants, who were crowded on the staircases and in the great open hall.

Pushing my way through a swarm of these wretches, I came upon a sergeant of our own troops, who was leaning wounded against the marble basin of a fountain.

He staggered to his feet and grasped me by the arm.

‘Oh, for God’s sake, sir, do something to stop those black devils!’ he cried; ‘they are murdering the women up yonder.’

‘Murdering the women?’

‘Yes; butchering them in cold blood. One of Omichund’s head peons, a man of high caste, has set fire to the house, and is slaughtering those helpless creatures to save them from the pollution of an honest Englishman’s touch. Half our men are

wounded, the rest mad with rage—there is no one can stop the hellish work. Hark !’

He pointed upwards as a long wild cry of despair rang out above our heads. I dashed towards the staircase, mounted with a rush, and broke through the first door I came to. It opened into one of the women’s apartments, which communicated with each other in a long range of gaily-decorated rooms, with gaudy painted ceilings and bright lattices, walls hung with muslin draperies, divans covered with rich embroidered stuffs, and in every corner the clumsy bepainted and begilded image of Doorgah, with her ten arms ; or Siva, seated on his white bull, the symbol of purity and dominion ; or Sukee, the Hindoo Ceres, crowned with grain ; or Ram, the protector of empires, encircled with a snake, and riding on a monkey.

A glance showed me these things in the first two rooms through which I passed. Of human life or death both these were empty ; but in the third room I came upon a spectacle the like of which has seldom frozen the heart of an Englishman.

Five women, all in the bloom of youth, lay stretched on the floor and divans, stabbed to death.

For a few thrilling moments I bent over each with the faint hope that among these victims of pagan prejudice some might yet be saved ; but, alas ! in every breast the vital spark was extinct. For a moment I paused to listen. I heard the hoarse clamour of men's voices in the court below, but upon this upper floor all was silence ; the hellish work was done.

I passed on, appalled by this unsurpassable horror. In the two following chambers I found eight more women, thirteen in all, massacred by the fury of the misguided wretch who doubtless thought that by this barbarous act he was securing his master's household from the abomination of the Christian's accursed touch, and further, procuring for his victims a swift transition to the heights of heaven, without the preliminary ordeal of those five worlds of purgation through which the soul despatched under ordinary circumstances must needs travel.

The bigotry which will cast its victims beneath the obscene car of the Hindoo Moloch, or enable them to be swung in mid-air by an iron hook thrust through the muscles of the spine, is an unknown quantity ; and I had less reason to be surprised by this dreadful scene than to regret that it should

have been caused, however indirectly, by the policy of the English Company.

While I stood, as if transfixed, gazing blankly upon the scene of ruin, a long hollow groan of human agony startled my ear, and looking in the direction whence it came, I perceived by the movement of a curtain that some sufferer yet lingered in the agony of death. I sprang towards the spot, pulled aside the curtain, and discovered a Hindoo servant lying close to the wall, desperately wounded, and with a bloody dagger grasped in his hand.

He rolled his black eyes towards me with a hideous expression of hate.

‘Away!’ he cried; ‘avaunt, accursed Englishman! Leave me to die by the wounds this hand has inflicted; or, if I am destined to live, be sure I shall be an instrument to execute vengeance on your hated race. Was it not enough that the glory of Hindostan should be trampled beneath the foot of the Mahometan invader? Was it not enough that the rugged hordes of Tamerlane should sweep over the mountains that defended the sons and successors of Brahmah? Was it not enough that the universal monarchy of India should be broken and spoiled by the lying followers of a false prophet, and the

glorious reign of Vicram blotted out like a forgotten dream by these Tartar destroyers of our gods ; nay, the holy temple of Benares buried beneath the impious shrine of our usurpers ? Is this last degradation to be worse than the first, and our masters' daughters defiled by the eaters of sheep and oxen ? Sooner may Siva, the destroyer, blast us with the murderous breath of his giant nostrils !'

'What !' I cried, 'are you the barbarous slaughterer of yonder helpless women ?'

'Yes,' answered this madman ; 'and were there fifty more, my hand should slay them, rather than they should fall into the power of your unholy race.'

'Mistaken wretch, they would have suffered no harm from us,' I answered.

'What !' he cried, 'are your soldiery so pure that you can answer for their treatment of my master's household ? or has my master received such kindness from the English traders he has served as shall warrant his women in trusting themselves to their mercy ? You lock him in your prison without allowing him an hour to bid his children good-bye or give orders to his household, and then you send your soldiers hither to ravage the house of the man who has served you faithfully for thirty years, and

whose service you reject with scorn at the first whisper of a slanderer.'

To this effect did the wounded wretch address me, in very pure Hindoostanee. He was a young man, with a powerful frame, and features which, when undistorted by pain, must have been singularly handsome.

I left him in utter disgust, yet not without some sense of shame for the proceedings of my masters. That Omichund was a traitor, I had little doubt, and his imprisonment in the fort an act of common prudence justified by the occasion ; but I considered the attack upon his house an act of violence at once unwarrantable and unwise.

The fire had been by this time extinguished, but the apartments I next entered were filled with smoke, through which the lamps glimmered faintly. In the first of these I groped for some time, half suffocated by the foul atmosphere, and found nothing ; but immediately on entering the second, I stumbled against a prostrate form, and for the moment supposed I had fallen upon another victim to the peon's fury.

I knelt down and raised the inanimate figure in my arms. The form was slender as that of a child,

and lay quite lifeless across my shoulder, as I bore my light burden from that suffocating atmosphere, overjoyed to feel the faint flutter of a heart which I had supposed to be stilled for ever.

As I returned towards the room where I had left the wounded peon, it flashed upon me that to carry my burden thither was but to convey a new victim to that murderous fanatic. For a few moments I paused, at a loss what to do. I knew not yet whether the helpless creature in my arms was wounded to death, and this faint throb I felt only the last expiring struggle, or whether animation was but suspended by the suffocating smoke. To be seen attempting to carry her from that house would be to doom her to instant death, and in all likelihood to perish with her.

Casting a rapid glance around the chamber in which I stood, I perceived that besides the lattices opening upon the court, there were windows on the opposite side, curtained with embroidered muslin. To tear aside the draperies, and survey the prospect from one of these windows was the work of an instant. Thank God ! here there seemed a chance of escape. The window opened on a balcony and veranda, whence a flight of steps led down to the garden, an extensive

area of highly-cultivated ground, on which Omichund had spent much care and money.

I was sufficiently familiar with the geography of Calcutta to know that this garden was bounded on one side by the Morattoe ditch, on the other by the garden belonging to that harpy, Govindram Metre, who possessed a handsome house next to that of Omichund. Could I but cross the garden unperceived, I might return to Fort William by the unfrequented road which followed the line of the Morattoe boundary, a road which was guarded by our own men, by whose aid I might perchance obtain a hackerry, in which to convey my helpless burden to the fort.

I opened the window, ran down the steps and into the garden, where the stars were shining upon the rich Oriental foliage, and where I heard the shrill cries of the jackals in the country beyond, like the voices of children at play. A huge vampire bat brushed across my face as I turned into one of the dark walks, and for the moment blinded me.

A kind of instinct guided me to the part of the garden which I wanted to reach ; and here I found a gate, guarded by a topaz in our service, who was lounging at his post, ignorant of, or indifferent to, the work of ruin going on so near him.

Now, for the first time, I paused to look upon the creature I had perchance snatched from the jaws of death. The night air had revived her senses. The heavy lids were slowly lifted from large dark eyes, which gazed upon me with a look of mingled fear and wonder.

‘Save them!’ she cried with a shudder, in that Indian language which was now familiar to me as my own,—‘save them, or he will slaughter them all—mother, sisters, all dead! Ah, why not Tara also? Shall Tara live when all she loves are slain?’

I saw the poor creature’s senses were yet wandering, and tried to soothe her with broken words of comfort, such as one speaks to a child, but made no attempt to enlighten her as to her real position. She seemed to me, indeed, scarce more than a child, and I had seen too little of Hindoo women of high caste not to be surprised by her beauty, which was perfect of its type, combining as it did the pure lines of the Greek with the rich colouring of the Asiatic.

It was not in this moment, however, that I awoke to a full sense of her loveliness. I thought now only of saving her, and hastened onward to a point where the topaz had told me I might possibly find that species of coach drawn by oxen which the natives call

a hackerry. I was fortunate enough to find such a vehicle, in which I placed my hapless companion, who had by this time fully recovered consciousness, and besought me most piteously to take her back to the house where her mother and sisters were lying.

I explained that to do this would be to carry her straight to death, and told her that I would convey her to some English ladies, who would succour and protect her.

She thanked me, but I could perceive she felt a sense of shame in my companionship, to which her despair alone rendered her comparatively indifferent. I took my beauteous charge straight to Mr. Holwell, assured that from him I should receive the wisest counsel and the most generous help. He was inexpressibly shocked by the catastrophe which I described to him; but after having assured the weeping damsel of his protection, he drew me aside, and I could see that my adventure was somewhat distasteful to him.

‘Upon my word, Bob, thou art an unlucky fellow!’ he exclaimed; ‘for thy most generous instincts only lead thee into mischief. If anything could complicate our relations with that crafty knave Omichund, it is

this chivalrous rescue of his granddaughter. Be sure he will swear that the whole affair yonder was a planned thing to enable you English Paris to ravish this Asiatic Helen. Were it not inhuman to harbour such a thought, I should be inclined to wish the poor child had perished with the rest of her family. But I will take her at once to Mrs. Witherington—a kind soul, as you know—who will keep your fair Hindoo in hiding till we can decide what is best to be done with her.'

Mrs. Witherington was the wife of one of the civil servants of the factory, a good, matronly creature, whom I knew and respected. To her house Mr. Holwell conducted the weeping Indian girl; but before the dear child was removed by him, she approached me suddenly, and falling on her knees at my feet, lifted her clasped hands towards me with a pathetic grace that touched me to the heart.

'Think not Tara is ungrateful,' she said, in that native language which sounded peculiarly melodious from her lips, 'or that she will ever forget the brave Englishman who has saved her. Ah, no, Sahab, she is not ungrateful—she is only despairing. She has lost all—all!'

Her voice was here made inarticulate by the sobs

that well-nigh choked her. I raised her from the ground, and Mr. Holwell, with a gentle force, removed her. He brought a dark cloak of his own, in which he wrapped this white-robed maiden, and, thus enveloped, was able to conduct her unobserved to Mr. Witherington's house, which was fortunately near at hand.

The next day, the 15th of June, was spent in frantic efforts to erect works of defence, which might wisely have been prepared in the long leisure of the last eight years, but which it was alike hopeless and useless now to attempt. Such an endeavour was, however, made; and now that the enemy was at the door, the civil and military commanders of the settlement showed themselves mightily energetic.

I had at the beginning of our troubles enlisted myself among the militia, and am proud to declare my association with a body of men who proved themselves more than equal to the better-trained military in courage, skill, and patience. With these gentlemen I spent the best part of the day at drill, and was amused by the eagerness of many a young Alexander who scarce knew one end of his gun from the other.

Even while thus employed, I could not keep my thoughts from Omichund and his lovely granddaughter. The images of the Indian girl, so helpless and desolate in her strange home, and of the old man in his prison, haunted me with a painful persistency.

When I met my patron in the evening at our melancholy dinner, he gave me a sad account of Omichund's condition.

'I knew that the tidings of his calamity must soon reach him,' said Mr. Holwell, 'and thought it best he should receive the news from my lips, with such extenuation as I could urge of our own share in the event. I found the old man pacing his prison-chamber—which is one of the best rooms in the fort—like some caged tiger, and it was some minutes before he would listen to me with any show of reason. He was most bitter in his denunciations of what he called our English perfidy, violently asseverated his innocence of any underhand dealings with the Nabob or the Nabob's people, and declared that—after profiting largely by his devotion and services—we had used him with unexampled cruelty, and were bent on reducing him to beggary. "You envy me my hard-won wealth," he cried, with a

piteous whine, "and would see me end my days as a mendicant in the streets of Calcutta."

'This was before he knew the fate of his household?' I asked.

'It was. Not once did he question me about his family. His every thought was of his treasures, and of these he raved like the veriest madman. Our detention of him at the fort was a trick to enable us to plunder his house. We were robbers, nothing but robbers. I bade him be calm, and summon all his fortitude to enable him to bear what I had to tell, since a worse calamity than the plunder of his treasures had fallen upon his house; and then I told him what had happened, defending the policy of the president, who had but sought to guard against the secret removal of his possessions. My tidings produced a more awful effect than I had anticipated. He fell on a sudden from loud raving to a kind of stupor, and glared at me with glassy eyes in utter silence. I stopped with him for a long time, endeavouring by every means I knew to comfort, or, at least, to win him to speak freely of his affliction; but in vain. For the space of an hour, as I believe, he sat silent, statue-like, gazing now at me, now into space, with the most awful look I ever beheld in

mortal eyes. At last his limbs stirred faintly, with a shivering motion, and he whispered between his clenched teeth, "And this too I owe the English!"

'Good heavens!' I exclaimed indignantly; 'it is no fault of ours that the chief of his servants is a bigot and a madman.'

'True, Bob; and this I tried to explain to him, but might as usefully have argued with the monsoon. He waved me from him, and with his stony gaze fixed upon blank space, cried aloud, like some prophet of old, "The day shall come when English maidens shall fear the power of the Hindoo despoiler, and when the blood of your children and your children's children shall be shed in payment of that which was spilt last night!" In this mood I left him, after entreating that all kindness and attention should be shown to him by those who have the care of his prison.'

'And you did not tell him of his granddaughter's escape?'

'No, Robert; for I saw he was in no mood to be consoled by that single rescue, and I feared that, to his suspicious mind, the circumstance would tell against us. It will be safer to let him know the truth by-and-by.'

CHAPTER III.

THE BOLT FALLS.

NEXT morning, the 16th of June, brought us tidings of the Nabob's approach. His army had crossed the river from Hooghly on the previous day, in a vast fleet of boats, and were fast bearing down on us—an armament as mighty in proportion to our numbers as that barbaric host which descended on the sea-sands of Marathon two thousand years before; and we, alas! had no Aristides. Now, for the first time in my life, I beheld the horror and confusion of war; and piteous was the scene which Calcutta presented to my unaccustomed eyes. Fear took possession of every breast. The Gentoo inhabitants who had not already fled abandoned their houses, carrying such possessions as they could, and flying they knew not whither, to escape the wrath of the tyrant; though what offence these, or we ourselves, had committed against Suraja Doulah I cannot conceive. While

the Gentoos thus scattered themselves, the Portuguese, to the number of two thousand, flocked to the fort, where men, women, and children were indiscriminately admitted, together with the Englishwomen, who all exchanged the doubtful shelter of their houses for the comparative security of Fort William. And now military and militia were ordered to their posts, from the northernmost of which the van of the Nabob's army was descried at mid-day.

I will not enter into the details of the siege that gave Calcutta into the hands of our bloodthirsty foe. A full account of the many errors and blunders which assisted our defeat has been published by my friend Mr. Holwell, who, as second in command, held one of the most dangerous outposts on the second and busiest day of our defence. That we had among us many brave men, there can be no doubt—from the gallant captain who perished in our subsequent most cruel agony of the Black Hole, to the fiery young civilian, who, on finding himself cut off from his party, refused quarter, and contrived to demolish five of the enemy in a hand-to-hand fight before he fell. But that we had amongst us not one great soldier is, alas! equally true. What might not have been

achieved for us, had there been time to call Clive to our aid! One hour of his presence might have saved us a hundred errors and a shameful fate; but Providence had willed it otherwise, and Clive only landed at Fort St. David on the day that witnessed the fall of Fort William.

Our errors were too numerous for detail, as the weakness of our defences is almost beyond description. A body of men who might have done wonders in the close quarters of Thermopylæ were scattered wide, as on the plains of Babylon; or, in plain words, instead of concentrating our forces at the fort, we attempted to hold three paltry batteries, which had been hastily erected on the land-sides of the city, each at some three hundred yards from the fort. Mr. Holwell was second in command at one of these posts; I had a subordinate rank at another; and from this moment both of us were as actively engaged in the defence as if we had held His Majesty's commission.

The first day closed with something like a triumph on the English side, owing to the valiant conduct of Ensign Pischard, who at midnight took his party across a rivulet, surprised four thousand of the enemy wrapt in slumber, spiked their guns, drove them

from their quarters, and returned to his station without the loss of a man.

The second day witnessed a defence as desperate as it was unavailing. The murderous wretch whose work I had beheld, Juggernaut Sing, Omichund's chief servant, had caused himself, wounded as he was, to be set on a horse, and he now appeared leading on the enemy to the weakest points of our defences, displaying superhuman ferocity, and a fiendish ingenuity in his endeavours to secure our ruin.

The struggle began with the break of day, and raged long and furiously at the batteries and in the streets, where the enemy got possession of several houses, from the windows of which they harassed us with a perpetual fire of small-arms.

Towards evening the batteries were abandoned, after much loss on our part, and a far greater waste of human life on the side of the enemy, whose inexhaustible numbers were scarcely to be weakened by slaughter. At dusk the English had retreated to the fort, the retirement to which point was not effected without difficulty. The abandonment of the batteries, upon which much reliance had been placed, was the signal for a kind of panic. The fort was noisy with

the clamours and groans of the Portuguese, who revealed their craven natures without compunction ; while the Armenian militia were worse than useless in this hour of peril. The English were still undaunted ; and little did I expect to see their spirits fail, let the issue of affairs be what it might.

At two o'clock in the morning a solemn council of war was held, to which civilians as well as military were admitted ; but, with a lamentable weakness on the part of our chiefs, we were allowed to disperse, after a debate of two hours, in a state of indecision as to whether we should immediately escape to the ships, or hold out for another day. With the first glimmer of morning the enemy's cannonade began, while their matchlock-men fired incessantly upon our yet inhabited houses, as well as on the bastions and ramparts. Ensign Pischard and his gallant party took possession of the Governor's house, but in a few hours returned to the fort wounded ; on which our men were recalled from our few remaining outposts. These were immediately seized by the enemy ; and the panic within the garrison increased with every moment.

Now arose a scene of dire confusion in the endeavour to dispose safely of the wretched Portuguese

women and children, whose presence had so intensified the horror of our situation. We had but small means of shipping-off these poor creatures, many boats having deserted under cover of night. To the few that remained the helpless wretches rushed helter-skelter, heedless of all attempts to preserve discipline. The result was fatal : several boats were swamped by the weight of their crew, and the poor creatures drowned or immediately sacrificed to the enemy, who remorselessly slaughtered such as floated to shore alive. These black demons had taken possession of the houses and enclosures along the bank of the river, whence they discharged fire-arrows into the *Dudaly* and other vessels.

The Englishwomen had by this time embarked on board the *Dudaly*, with several of the garrison. These, alarmed by the fire-arrows, instead of returning to the fort, removed the ship three miles down the river to Govindpore, on their own responsibility. The contagion of this example spread but too fast. All the other vessels weighed anchor and sailed after the ship ; while many of the militia, appalled by this sudden desertion, made haste to abandon the shore. Among the military who had left us in charge of the women, and were too prudent to return,

was my old enemy, Sergeant O'Blagg. The experience of the siege had convinced me that this gentleman's heroism went no farther than the employment of big words, and a bellowing, bullying manner to his inferiors. In active service he preferred the better part of valour.

Mr. Holwell's plate, jewels, and papers had been embarked in the *Diligence* Snow during the previous evening. He and I were now together on the ramparts—a post of no small danger—and I could see by his manner that he was prepared for the worst. The Governor had until this moment been firm, and, although no soldier, had exposed himself to danger with considerable spirit; but at this crisis he seems to have lost all fortitude, and seeing his friends embarking in the two solitary boats that remained, and being further disheartened by the insubordination of his men, and the tidings that our little remaining gunpowder was unfit for use, he forgot at once the grave responsibilities of his position and the dictates of honour, and joined in the ignoble flight. The news of this last disgrace was brought to us by Philip Hay, who had fought like a devil throughout the siege, and whose powder-blackened face was scarcely recognizable this morning.

'Did you ever see such a set of curs, Bob?' exclaimed Mr. Holwell, as the *Dudaly* and the smaller vessels disappeared from our gaze.

'But it is surely only a feint, sir,' I answered; 'they are coming back?'

'Yes, Bob, when Calcutta is a heap of ashes, and they are brought back as captives of the Soubah. Be sure they will never return of their own accord. They have left us to perish, lad; that is what it means.'

We went into the fort, where the remaining inhabitants flocked around my patron, loud in the expression of their indignation against the deserters.

'You have always been true to our interests, Holwell,' cried the eldest member of Council remaining among us; 'I resign my right of command in your favour.'

A loud cheer signified the general approval of this decision.

Mr. Holwell quietly accepted the onerous duty thus assigned him, thanked his superior and the rest for their confidence, and marched straight to the western gate leading to the river, whither I followed, with Philip Hay and some others.

'We will have no more deserters, Bob,' said our

new Governor ; ‘ and when we leave Fort William, it shall be together, and in a decent soldierly manner.’

A ship which had been stationed at the northern redoubt still remained, and to this vessel Mr. Holwell despatched an officer in a boat, with orders to the captain to bring her down to the fort. But this last hope was destined to fail us,—the ship struck upon a sandbank, and was at once abandoned by her crew.

We watched this catastrophe with a groan of despair, but did not the less vigorously defend our feeble post. Towards afternoon the enemy’s fire abated, and they amused themselves by burning such of the adjacent houses as did not command our ramparts. No longer harassed by their incessant fire, we spent the greater part of the afternoon and ensuing night in throwing out signals for the return of the ships ; but neither flags by day nor signal-fires by night would tempt these cravens back to us ; yet a single sloop with fifteen men on board might have dropped under our walls during the night and saved every one of us.

In that long day and night of suspense I had but one source of consolation ; and that was in the knowledge that the poor little Gentoo maiden I had rescued was safe on board the *Dudaly*, where Mrs.

Witherington had taken her among her children and native nurses, for one of whom she had easily passed in the confusion of the embarkment.

While the signal-lights were vainly burning, Philip Hay and I paced one of the terraces, and talked over our situation. In the failure of our rescue by the vessels now lying at Govindpore, death seemed inevitable ; and we could not refrain from a shudder as we wondered what agonizing form of death the Soubah's ingenuity might devise for us.

'I have always thought there was something heroic in being blown from the mouth of a cannon,' said the imperturbable Philip ; 'and the sensation, if unpleasant, must be brief. But I doubt if Suraja Doulah will not reserve so dignified a mode for Holwell and our superiors. These Mahometans have a knack of putting out an enemy's eyes ; but I fancy that is an honourable torture they only confer upon near relations. And then there is the slow poison of the *poust*—that too is a privilege allowed only to kindred. But no doubt this Oriental Caligula has numerous modes of executing such small fry as our humble selves, for the titillation of that fine artistic sense of cruelty with which he is said to be gifted. I have somewhere heard that in the old

Hindoo law a man who assaults a magistrate shall be punished as if he had murdered a hundred Brahmins, and, a spike being thrust through him, shall be roasted alive. Perhaps the Nabob may choose to dress us in Hindoo fashion.'

Before daybreak, the enemy swarmed to the attack in greater numbers than ever; and Mr. Holwell, moved by the entreaties of the weaker spirits among us, consented to treat with our adversary. I went with him to Omichund, whom he had not seen since the day on which he had been the bearer of such fatal news.

We found the old man singularly calm and reasonable.

'I have come to ask your aid, Omichund,' Mr. Holwell began at once. 'We have been abandoned by the greater number of our people, though we might have left Fort William with dignity, and secured all the books and papers of the Company, had the Governor and the rest but stood by us. Our position is now desperate, and as your fortunes are linked with ours, I look to you for any help you can afford us.'

The old Gentoo bent his head in silence.

'You have been a fast friend of Manickchund, the

Governor of Hooghly, who is now before the fort in command of a body of troops,' continued Mr. Holwell. 'A letter from you to him may secure us more favourable terms than we could make for ourselves. Will you write such a letter?'

'Yes, Saheb, I will write.'

'You will bid Manickhund inform the Soubah that if he will cease hostilities, the English will obey his commands. We are only fighting in defence of our lives and honour.'

'Yes, Saheb, I will write. If the English Company had trusted Omichund, he might have served them at the Durbar, and hindered the coming of this day.'

'Ay, friend, we have made many mistakes,' Mr. Holwell answered sadly.

The letter was written and thrown over the ramparts at sunrise; but hostilities continued until noon. Of the hundred and ninety men left after the desertion of the ships, twenty-five had been killed or had received their death-wounds, seventy were disabled, while the common soldiers had broken open the storehouse of arrack, and were stupidly intoxicated.

At four in the afternoon a man was seen advancing with a flag of truce in his hand. This was at once

answered by another on the south-east bastion ; for by this time every voice was calling on Mr. Holwell to surrender. A parley ensued, during which the enemy were doing us all the harm they could, while one wretch fired at one of our gentlemen as he stood on the bastion by Mr. Holwell's side. Infuriated by this treachery, my patron ran down to summon the men to the ramparts ; but he called in vain. The poor creatures who would have obeyed him had crawled, wounded and helpless, into the fort ; and whilst he was seeking these, amongst whom was Philip Hay, the drunken soldiers, bent on escaping by the river, burst open the western gate just as a body of the enemy had forced a gate beyond it, and were rushing to the attack of this. By this act of supreme cowardice and folly the foe were admitted, and swarmed into the fort, a torrent of exulting savages, shouting their Moorish cries of victory. The warehouses were escaladed at the same moment ; a general surrender followed, and we all were prisoners of Suraja Doulah, except a few desperate wretches who dropped from the embrasures, and escaped along the slime of the river.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE BLACK HOLE.

AT five o'clock the Nabob entered the fort, sent his officers at once to seize upon the Company's treasury, and installed himself with all pomp in the chief apartment of the factory, where he received the servile compliments of his flatterers, who extolled the conquest of a handful of worn-out civilians with such florid eloquence as may have been lavished on Alexander after the battle of Gaugamela. Omichund and Raja Bullub's son were both summoned before this eastern tyrant, who received them with promising civility ; after which he sent for Mr. Holwell, whom he favoured with no less than three interviews, the last in Durbar, or solemn council, at a little before seven o'clock.

At this last interview I had the honour to be present, in attendance on my master, and for the first time beheld the tyrant whose sanguinary reign was

happily to be of the briefest. I saw a handsome young man of the higher eastern type, superbly attired, and glittering with jewels, who surveyed my patron and myself with suspicious, if not malevolent, looks.

He had been much disappointed by the contents of the treasury—some fifty thousand rupees—and accused us of having hidden or buried the Company's wealth.

‘But you will show me where it is hidden, or it will be the worse for you,’ he said in a threatening tone.

Mr. Holwell assured him in the most emphatic manner that the money in the treasury constituted the sole funds of the Company at this settlement.

‘Would you make me eat dirt?’ he cried contemptuously; ‘would you fool me with your English lies? You are all thieves, and have robbed my honoured grand-uncle, the late Nabob, for the last fifteen years. You sell your passports to Gentoo merchants, who thus cheat us of our revenues. You took payment for your protection of that Gentoo traitor, Kissendass, and the wealth which he has stolen from my uncle's treasury. You have fattened too long upon the land, and it is time there should

be an end of you. Inshallah, did I not swear to my dying grand-uncle that I would blot you from the face of the country, and shall I not keep my oath ?'

This was by no means promising ; but Mr. Holwell contrived so far to mitigate the Soubah's displeasure that he presently dismissed us for the night, with a languid yawn, after pledging his word as a soldier that no harm should happen to us.

Cheered by this hopeful prospect, we left the royal presence, and were at once conducted to the Arched Veranda, west of the Black-Hole Prison, where we found the rest of our wretched company, many among them severely wounded, and all exhausted by days of struggle and nights of watching. Here they were all gathered—some leaning against the wall, others seated hopelessly on the ground—helpless and meek as sheep in an overcrowded market awaiting the butcher, and closely guarded.

For some time we remained in patient silence, broken only by the feeble groans of the wounded, until flames breaking out right and left of us caused a sudden panic. We thought our enemies were going to suffocate us between two fires, and were confirmed in this fear by seeing officers and people with lighted torches going into all the apartments

under the easterly curtain to the right of us, bent, as we supposed, on setting fire to them.

A few minutes' hurried consultation succeeded, and rather than wait to be roasted alive, we determined upon falling on the guard, seizing their cimeters, and trying to cut our way through the troops on the parade. Before thus desperately rushing on almost certain death, Mr. Holwell advanced to watch the proceedings of the men with torches, and returned to tell us they were no incendiaries, but were only seeking a place in which to confine us for the night.

At this moment Leech, the Company's smith, who had made his escape when the Nabob entered the fort, approached Mr. Holwell, and told him in a whisper that he had a boat ready, and knew of a secret passage through which he would conduct him to the river. My patron nobly refused to leave the companions who had so affectionately confided in him, and Leech as nobly volunteered to remain and share his fate, which generous resolution, I regret to say, cost the poor fellow his life.

All this was decided in a few hurried whispers, and was scarce settled when a body of the guard advanced to us, with the officers whose blazing

torches had so alarmed us. They ordered us into the barracks, a great open place, with arches facing westward, and furnished with a spacious wooden platform, on which we might have passed the night in tolerable comfort.

We entered willingly, eager to repose even on this Spartan couch ; but were no sooner within the barracks than the guards advanced to the inner arches and parapet-wall, and, with presented muskets, ordered us to go into that small square room in which I had already spent a night, commonly called the Black-Hole Prison ; whilst others from the court, off guard, pressed upon us with clubs and drawn cimeters. So sudden and unexpected was the stroke, and so great the throng and pressure upon us, that we rolled like a torrent into the prison ; though, I think, had many of us known the narrow limits of the dungeon, we should, even in this last extremity, have rushed upon the guard and suffered them to hew us piecemeal rather than force us living into that torture-chamber.

Now followed a scene of horror I think unparalleled in the history of past ages. One hundred and forty-six wretches, many among them wounded past hope, all exhausted by continual fatigue and action,

jammed together in a space of eighteen feet square, open only by two small close-barred windows looking to the westward, a quarter whence at this season no air could come.

The first impulse was one wild burst of rage. A block of living creatures rolled desperately against the door, in the hope to force it open. But, alas! the door opened inwards, and this dead weight could do nothing against it. Some of these unarmed wretches next tried to drag it open with their hands and nails, and fell back presently with bleeding, lacerated fingers, howling with pain. I, who was at this period crushed into a corner, with Philip Hay's weight leaning full upon me, and the blood from a sabre-wound on his forehead trickling slowly on my face, could but indistinctly perceive what was passing. After some minutes of riot and confusion, I heard my patron's voice, sounding singularly calm and clear above the clamour of the rest. He had fortunately been among the first to enter our dungeon, and had thus been carried close to one of the windows.

He exhorted us in the most pathetic terms to a patient endurance of our sufferings, as the only means whereby we might any of us hope to survive

the night. On this followed a brief interval of comparative tranquillity, during which, by the surging movement of the restless crowd, I was borne without effort of my own close to the window at which Mr. Holwell was posted, Philip Hay's weight still bearing down upon me, and was by this accident of position among the few who outlived the night. Near me, clinging to the bars of the window, I perceived a sergeant's wife, one Mrs. Carey, the only woman among us, whose husband was also in the prison.

Nothing could be more admirable than my patron's calmness throughout this night of horror. He watched the faces of the guard who were posted outside the bars of our window, and whose countenances were now made visible by the fitful glare of their torches, now hidden in darkness. Among these was an old Indian sergeant, in whose looks Mr. Holwell read something like pity. He implored this man to get us relieved by being divided into separate cells, since there were chambers enough in which we could be placed. He further pressed his entreaty by the promise of a thousand rupees, to be paid the sergeant next morning.

The man disappeared, and for a few delicious moments we, who had heard the brief dialogue,

enjoyed the rapture of hope. He returned but too soon, to tell us the thing was impossible. Mr. Holwell was not to be satisfied so easily. He reiterated his entreaties, and this time doubled his promised reward. Again the sergeant withdrew, and again returned with the same answer. The thing was impossible without the Soubah's order. The Soubah was sleeping, and no one dared waken him. One hundred and forty-six wretches languishing in the awful tortures of suffocation, and for them there is no hope because the Soubah is sleeping! I think there is one last long slumber from which Suraja Doulah, Soubahdar of Bengal, Behar, and Oriza, will be awakened without ceremony, and that the waking will hardly be a pleasant one.

We had not been shut into this hole of horrors ten minutes when every one among us fell into a perspiration so profuse as to drain every drop of moisture from our bodies. This brought on a raging thirst, which increased every instant. Some now proposed that we should strip ourselves of our clothes, and thus gain at once space and coolness. Many did so, though I can but wonder how they contrived to tear off their garments, so closely were we wedged together. It was then recommended that

we should all sit down ; and this advice we several times obeyed for a few minutes at a time ; but every time the word was given to 'rise,' some of the weaker among us were trampled or crushed in the struggle, never to rise again.

Before we had been more than an hour immured, our thirst became painful to an almost maddening degree, and a cry for 'water' was repeated without cessation. It was a hoarse, perpetual clamour, which resembled the insensate lowing of thirsty cattle rather than the reasonable demand of humanity.

And at this juncture the very compassion which sought to aid us was made an instrument of our destruction ; for the old Indian sergeant, taking pity on our agonies, ordered some skins of water to be brought to the window. The water appeared, but the openings between the bars were too narrow to enable the skins to be passed in to us. A clamour and raving as of a thousand devils arose ; and many bewildered wretches fought furiously with one another without knowing what they 'did. Mr. Holwell and two others near the window contrived to pass a little water in among us in hats ; but in the fury and contention of this mad crowd these

precious draughts were wasted, and but a few drops reached the lips of the stronger struggler who last seized the fragile vessel. The very sight of this water seemed to increase our thirst twenty-fold, though it had been unbearable before; for to this agony there appears to be no limit.

The cries and ravings of those beyond the reach of this too-tantalizing relief were awful beyond description. I heard old and valued friends calling on my patron by every adjuration of affection for but a few drops to relieve their tortures. Some desperate creatures made a frantic effort to reach the windows, and many were trampled to death beneath their reckless feet. Over these corpses the crowd clambered and struggled, unawed by the horrors of death, each sufferer bent only on obtaining relief for his own pangs.

Can humanity in the West conceive so horrid a picture of Eastern cruelty? These hellish agonies proved vastly entertaining to the guard without, who held their torches close to the bars, and peered in upon us with hideous grins upon their black faces, jeering and hooting at us for very joy.

I cannot imagine a more vivid vision of hell. A herd of suffering wretches, with parched tongues

lolling from their fevered lips, wrestling insensately with each other in the thick smoke and stench of Tophet, while black-faced demons glare upon and gloat over their anguish !

I think I must have been delirious at this time ; for I heard a voice, which was my own, and yet seemed not my own, repeating the words of Dives : ‘ Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame.’

O God, what a Pandemonium ! On one side rose the blasphemies and imprecations of unbelieving despair ; on another, fainter prayers for release or death ; the choking sobs and hollow groans of the dying ; the Babel-clamour of several languages ; while near the windows the crowd were assailing the guard with every imaginable insult, in the hope that they would fire in upon us, and put an end to our misery.

What ! cut short so amusing a comedy ? To such spectators the best drolling in Bartlemy Fair would have been a poorer show. Was it to be supposed these merry souls would sacrifice such

pleasant entertainment as this exhibition afforded them ?

I know not at what hour it was, or how long I had suffered. I know it seemed as if I had been in that foul pit a lifetime, when I felt Philip Hay's arm round my neck, and heard him whispering in my ear.

'Bob,' he said, 'have you ever forgiven me for selling you into bondage ?'

'You know I was so foolish as to forgive you long ago.'

'You are the best of creatures. Oh, Bob, what a scoundrel I have been ! My life has been one long villany. I think I was only born into this world to speak lies and plot treachery. But I was born so poor. Poverty is the father of scoundrels. But I am dying ; and I want you to bless me before I die. Let me suck the sweat from your shirt-sleeve ; 'tis my sole chance of moistening this red-hot furnace in my throat. Would you bless me, if I gave you your freedom ? Supposing you ever escape from this hell, and get back to England, which is doubtful, would you bless me, if I told you that the marriage in Fleet Lane was no marriage—that Margery Hawker is no wife of yours ?'

‘What do you mean?’ I gasped.

‘I mean that her name is Margery Hay. She is my wife. I was in Paris with those two before I hunted you out in the Temple. I had helped in the elopement, you know, and was *his* gentleman body-servant, henchman, bully, and hanger-on in general. The poor child fretted over her dishonour, and *he* proposed to make an honest woman of her by marrying her—to me. I know not by what process of reasoning he won her consent, but he did win it. She was to go back to her father and mother as the wife of a decent gentleman, one Mr. Philip Hay, and not as the poor waif and stray she was. We were married by the chaplain of the British Legation—I in the character of Mr. Lestrangle’s secretary; but beyond that marriage ceremony we are no more man and wife than I and the Empress Catherine. Mr. Lestrangle contrived to prevent the poor soul’s return to the home from which he stole her, for, you see, at this time he had not quite made up his mind that he was tired of her; and he despatched me to London in search of you, with ample instructions for my part of spy. Then arose the notable scheme of marrying Margery to you, to prevent your marriage with Miss Dorothea, and thus make assurance

doubly sure in the event of our kidnapping plan proving a failure. A tangled web of intrigue, is it not? I left the certificate of my marriage in the safe keeping of a friend in London, in case it should ever be wanted.'

'What friend?' I asked eagerly; for I felt him growing heavier as he hung upon me, while his whispers sounded fainter in my ear. 'Your friend's name, Phil!' I cried; 'for God's sake tell me that!'

'A lawyer, and a fellow I can trust. A scoundrel, Bob; but your thorough-paced scoundrels can trust each other. It's only your half-and-half rogue who turns traitor.'

'His name?'

Too late. His arm loosened upon my neck, and he slipped down in a sitting position, not to rise again within my knowledge.

I tried to bend over him, in the hope of picking him up, but found myself powerless to move a limb, so close was I packed. A faint glimmer of dawn now lighted the chamber, and I looked right and left at my neighbours. One was a topaz, the other an English sergeant, both dead. They stood on each side of me, statue-like and hideous figures—dead,

but unable to fall from the equal pressure round us.

On the opposite side of the dungeon was the long wooden platform on which I had once slept. This was heaped with the dead and dying—a very mountain of corpses.

Of the revolting stench that now prevailed, and of other physical horrors, I dare not speak. As the day dawned, there arose a kind of calm ; the clamour had altogether abated, so much were our numbers reduced by death.

As the light increased, my breathing became every moment more oppressive. I had lived through the night with intervals of delirium. In one of these I had fancied myself in a wooded valley at Hauteville, while before me, cool and pellucid, stretched a great pool of water, the banks of which had been a favourite resort of mine and Margery's in our brief happy childhood. This vision now returned, and no words can paint the agony with which I gazed on that delusive picture, longing to plunge into those cool depths, and yet bound hand and foot by the pressure of our charnel-house. When this mirage faded, consciousness vanished with it.

I was awakened by a rush of air and a sensation

of acute agony, caused by the oppression of my head and chest. Lifting my eyelids with a painful effort, I perceived that the door of our dungeon stood a little way open. I heard afterwards that this had only been effected after full twenty minutes' labour, so difficult was it for the worn-out survivors to remove the dead piled up against this door.

Of the one hundred and forty-six who entered that dungeon some twelve hours before, twenty-three now crawled slowly out, one by one, between a lane of corpses; nor do I think that in the seven circles of his purgatory the Poet-seer beheld any ghosts more awful than those living creatures who thus emerged into the light of day.

CHAPTER V.

RELEASE.

I FOUND myself shortly after our release sitting on the wet grass outside the veranda, in a stupefied condition, staring vacantly on the prostrate form of my patron, who was stretched at full length beside me. I think I had followed him and remained with him by a kind of instinct, which was something less than sense or affection; for my brain was dazed, and all that followed during this day, and several other days, seemed of the nature of a dream.

First came a vision of a spacious chamber, adorned with a certain barbaric splendour—the throne-chamber of a conqueror—roughly put together in a house half destroyed by cannon-shot;—a handsome brown face and glittering eyes, arched brows of deepest black scowling upon us under a jewelled turban, and round about us a crowd of grinning slaves and parasites, and the flash of arms, and the gaudy colouring of Moorish uniforms.

This is Suraja Doulah, before whom my patron

has been brought to answer for his misdeeds, and to confess what he has done with the English wealth that is missing from the treasure-chamber of the factory.

I hear a voice that is strange and yet familiar relating, in faint, broken accents, the horrors of last night; and, looking towards the speaker, see Mr. Holwell sitting on a heap of plundered books, supported on each side by a Moorish sergeant, and with a countenance more ghastly than death.

The Sun of the State has neither time nor attention for this stupid recital of human agony.

‘Tell me where the English treasure is buried,’ he cries savagely; ‘that there is hidden wealth in this place, I know; and you, who held the fort when the others had fled, doubtless helped to put it away. Lead my treasurer to the hiding-place, or, by the soul of the Prophet, you shall be blown from a cannon’s mouth before sunset.’

‘Death, saheb, has no terror for me,’ answered Mr. Holwell calmly; ‘I suffered last night an anguish as many times worse than sudden death as there are grains in a handful of sand. Think not I fear death at the mouth of a cannon, or from the lash of a native executioner.’

He then, with a most wonderful calmness, proceeded to assure the Soubahdar that none of the Company's money had been buried or hidden, and to explain how it happened that the treasury was so low at the time of the siege; how the greater part of the native merchandise had been shipped before the month of April, while the vessels containing our British importations had not yet arrived; and how we were thus as poor in goods as in cash,—which last was diminished by the large sums advanced to native factors, whose cotton-stuffs would only be ready in the ensuing year.

The tyrant listened, but half-convinced as I could perceive, and, with a muttered execration, ordered us from his presence as prisoners, in the charge of the general of the household troops.

Mr. Holwell reminded him of his solemn promise of honourable treatment; but this question he waived, and still harped upon the hidden treasure.

We were carried in a hackerry to the general's camp, which lay within the Morattoe ditch, and near Omichund's garden, full three miles from the fort. The rest of the survivors were set at liberty, with the exception of Mrs. Carey, our one female companion in that fatal death-chamber. This wretched

creature—whose husband, a man of full habit, had expired of suffocation—happened to be young and handsome. She was conducted at once to the Soubah's zenana ; and by this one cruel instance, we may divine what fate would have awaited other Englishwomen had they been so unfortunate as to fall into the power of this Moorish profligate.

The dead were thrown promiscuously into the ditch of an unfinished ravelin, and hastily covered with the loose earth.

Arrived at the camp, we were loaded with fetters, and thrust, with two miserable companions—also members of the Company's civil service—into a sepoy's tent, four feet long by three wide, and about three feet high. Here we lay, half in and half out of the tent. But although a heavy rain fell without ceasing all through the ensuing night, it was as a night in Paradise compared with the sufferings that had gone before.

My next vision is of a march under the burning sun, the march of four ghastly figures, heavily laden with fetters, scarce able to drag their weary limbs onward at the savage word of command. Then a night in an open veranda fronting the broad bright

river, the four wretches still laden with irons, and guarded by a strong detachment of stalwart Mahometans—it is so probable these fever-stricken, fettered creatures will try to run away.

Now comes a journey in an open boat, a journey that seems endless. The four English wretches have broken out into boils, which spread all over their bodies like the boils of Job. The boat draws a good deal of water, and the four sufferers lie on a bed of wet bamboos. When the crew are negligent of baling, the sufferers wake from fitful feverish slumber to find themselves half under water. But after the Black Hole this is luxury: yes, even though no one of the sufferers can move his cramped and fettered limbs without inflicting exquisite tortures upon himself, or on his companions. These travellers are half naked, and for sole defence from sun, rain, and dew, possess a ragged bit of matting, which they begged as they were leaving the dock-head at Calcutta. Their diet is rice-water gruel.

And so up the noble river to the town of Hooghly, scarce a less ghastly burden than the corpses which piety sets afloat on the sacred waters. Forward again, with numerous misadventures, to Santipore, where our open boat broke down, and a request:

sent to the Zemindar for another boat was refused ; and here, after incalculable sufferings endured by my patron, who was marched to the rebellious Zemindar ironed as he was, his legs streaming with blood, his body faint and exhausted by fever, fatigue, and pain, we were at last transferred to an open fishing-dingy. In this boat we endured a new torture from want of room, and so continued our voyage, which only ended on the afternoon of July 7th, having thus lasted thirteen days.

Much kindness had been shown us on our way, notably by Mr. Law, the manager of the French factory, who bribed our guards to indulge us, and provided us with clothes, linen, provisions, liquors, and cash.

We landed at Muxadayad, and after being marched as felons through the streets of the city, were deposited in an open stable near the Soubah's palace. Here we lay, closely guarded on one side by Moors, on the other by Gentoos, and almost stifled by the crowds of spectators who came from all quarters of the city to stare at this pleasing show, and so blocked us in from morning till night that we narrowly escaped a second suffocation.

On the 11th of July the Soubah arrived at the

city from Calcutta, which he had rechristened Ally-nuggur, the Fort of Ally, in pious commemoration of his heroic victory. We were now moved from the stable to a bungalow, and flattered with hopes of speedy release. These hopes were, however, suddenly destroyed by the intelligence that the Soubah had determined upon sending us back to Calcutta in irons, to be delivered to the mercy of Manickchund, the new governor. My patron now abandoned himself to despair, protesting that we should never be got alive out of the hands of that Hindoo miser.

Seeing nothing but destruction before us, we dined with the desperate appetite of wretches doomed to immediate execution, and lay down to sleep with the lazy apathy of despair. From this slumber we were wakened suddenly by the chief of our guard, who told us the Soubah was approaching on his way to the palace. Resolved to appeal once more to this wretch, we entreated the guard to leave us free to see and be seen by him; and when the royal litter came abreast of our shelter, saluted the tyrant with the usual salaam.

Perchance some touch of pity was actually awakened in that brutal breast; or it may have been

that Suraja Doulah was weary of torturing us, and was at last convinced of our poverty. He beckoned us to the side of his palanquin, stared at us inquisitively from head to foot for some moments, as at some curious spectacle, and then ordered the guard to strike off our irons and set us free.

It was all the work of a few minutes. We stood in the road staring at one another stupidly, until one of us burst into tears, and we fell upon each other's breasts and embraced as Englishmen rarely do in the most moving moments.

CHAPTER VI.

I TAKE SERVICE WITH A NEW MASTER.

AFTER receiving hospitable entertainment and much kindness from the gentlemen of the Dutch factory, we started on our journey to Fulta, where the fugitives from Calcutta were now stationed. The care of our Dutch friends had done much to recover us; but we were still shattered in health and spirits, and mere shadows of what we had been before that fatal night of the 20th of June. At Fulta we found nothing but misery. The frightened creatures who had left Calcutta had fled for the most part without so much as a change of clothing, and were now herded together in the ships, where they slept on the decks, exposed to all the hardships of weather, and threatened on every side by death; for this part of the river is most unhealthy, and a malignant fever had already begun to decimate our

countrymen when Mr. Holwell and I arrived at Fulta.

He spoke with considerable warmth of the folly the English were guilty of in remaining at this miserable station one hour after the wind and weather permitted them to make for Madras.

‘These people have a perfect genius for fatal mistakes,’ he said to me. ‘What could be easier for them than to push on to Madras? yet they stick here, at a constant waste both of life and money, since ships have to be kept here in order to protect them. They say that to leave the river would be to give up the cause for lost. It would be but abandoning a cause already lost, and lost by their own misconduct. *These* miserable creatures can do nothing to retake Calcutta; and whatever effort is to be made for its recapture would be assisted by our departure, as the Nabob would consider we had abandoned the notion as hopeless, and would thus be thrown off his guard.’

The fugitives were, however, in no humour to listen to reason. They had lost everything. The wealth and independence for which they had toiled for years, the golden fruit of many a lucky speculation, the prize of many a bold adventure, had been

snatched from them in a single night. Nothing could be more complete than the ruin of the English in Bengal at this juncture; and he must have been a bold visionary who could dream we should ever regain our footing there. Happily for us, there was ONE such daring dreamer; but not amongst the fever-stricken, despairing fugitives of Fulta.

Here we remained for five long dreary months, during which I had some occupation in assisting my patron to draw up a full and particular account of the defence and surrender of Fort William, together with the intrigues that preceded the Soubah's attack. This paper proved of great value to him afterwards, when anonymous slanderers, aided by the malice of a faction, would have stigmatized him as the chief cause of our troubles in the June last past.

This dismal interval gave me but too much leisure in which to brood over my private troubles, and above all to consider that strange piece of information which Philip Hay had volunteered in the Black Hole Prison. Whether that faithful-unfaithful companion of mine had outlived the 20th of June I knew not; but he had not yet appeared at Fulta, where most of the survivors had found their way,

after receiving some kindness from Omichund, who was now high in the favour of Suraja Doulah, and who, in spite of his wrongs, had shown this much charity to the English.

‘I have little doubt the wily old Gentoo betrayed us, Bob,’ said Mr. Holwell; ‘but when he moved the hidden spring of the machine that crushed us, he knew not how deadly an instrument he was setting in motion. The ruin he intended for us has engulfed his own treasures, and he has suffered alike in his affections and his pocket. But so long as he refills the last, I fancy he can bring himself to endure the wounds inflicted on the first. They say he is in a fair way to get his money restored to him by the Soubah, and he seems to take the annihilation of his family with exemplary fortitude.’

‘Yet the Hindoos are an affectionate race, sir.’

‘True, Bob; but the man who gives his soul to the worship of lucre has no room for any other affection. Remember the inspired sentence: “Thou canst not serve God and Mammon.” When Shylock has to choose between his daughter and his money-bags, be sure he will take the latter.’

‘I hope the English will not be so weak as to trust Omichund again, sir,’ I said.

‘Trust him? No, Robert; but if we want his services we shall buy them. The man will sell Suraja Doulah to us, as he sold us to Suraja Doulah, if we can pay him his price. We English traders have never been over-particular in the choice of our tools. We should be more than human did we not sometimes take a lesson in political manœuvring from these unscrupulous Moors.’

At Fulta I frequently saw the gentle Indian maiden whom it had been my good fortune to rescue from a violent end. The simple creature regarded me with so warm a gratitude as to shame my small and accidental service; but when I suggested some plan for conveying her back to her grandfather, she shrank affrighted from the idea of such a return. By her association with the English, and the performance of small menial duties in good Mrs. Witherington’s service, she had lost caste; and she told me in all seriousness that her grandfather would rather have known her dead with the rest than so dishonoured a survivor.

‘Let me stay with the good English lady,’ she pleaded; ‘and with the dear English babies who love me. They are sick, and they need Tara.’

Sure I am that a more faithful nurse never

watched a sick-bed than this dear girl. I was stricken with fever myself while I stayed aboard ship, and she tended me with unwearying devotion; a care so fond and tender that, had I not been bound heart and soul by the old hopeless love, I must needs have given her my affection, and formed one of those alliances which are of such frequent occurrence in this country.

Had I so pledged my heart and my honour, as God is my judge, I would have been true to the vows thus made, and would have scorned to repudiate a tie so holy, as I have but too often seen such ties repudiated by my countrymen.

One day during my slow recovery from the fever, some unconscious touch of tenderness in the Gentoo maiden's tone and manner awakened me to a sense of danger to her in this most innocent companionship. As her deliverer, she had been from the first inclined to regard me with a somewhat romantic feeling; and in the confusion of our wretched existence at Fulta we two had been thrown more together than we could have been under any but such exceptional circumstances. Unintentionally to win this gentle heart, and wound it, would have been a real affliction to me; so, convinced that in such matters

candour is ever wiser than diplomacy, I made some excuse for relating the story of my youth, and told Tara how I had loved, and how I had lost all dear to me in the home I had left so far away.

The passionate sorrow with which she heard the conclusion of my story showed me that my fancy had been no vain delusion of a coxcomb, and that plain-mannered, dark-faced Robert Ainsleigh had indeed been so unlucky as to win this tender heart. All that the affection of a brother could do to alleviate a grief which I was bound to respect, and in a manner ignore, I did ; and my Indian maiden smiled as she parted from me. But from this time I carefully avoided any renewal of our familiar intercourse ; and when I by-and-by left the wretched settlement, our parting, although affectionate, was of the briefest.

Mr. Holwell's property embarked in the *Diligence* Snow had all fallen into the hands of the enemy, and he now decided upon returning to England for the restoration of his shattered health. My own savings, the yearly residue of a very modest salary, and the result of two or three happy investments, had been confiscated with the effects of my patron,

and I was now penniless. Thus, though I yearned to revisit England with a passionate longing, I felt myself constrained to remain in Bengal, since I could not with a decent grace ask the favour of my passage-money from Mr. Holwell's impoverished resources.

To stay behind seemed a dismal prospect, for my patron's departure would leave me without a friend. The fugitives of Fulta were all too much disgusted with their reverse of fortune to be capable of charity. Their sole delight consisted in quarrelling and recrimination; and until this period of my life I had no adequate notion of the pettiness to which humanity can sink when unsustained by fortitude.

'And these are Christian gentlemen!' I said to myself as I surveyed their sordid squabbles. 'Oh, for a generous heathen, a Themistocles or a Cincinnatus, to show these paltry spirits how a great mind can rise superior to calamity!'

I have since thought that my own fortitude under the loss of fortune may possibly have been attributable to the fact that I had very little to lose, and that I may have been somewhat hard on these unhappy merchants, who had lost a great deal.

In imagining that my position would be utterly hopeless after my patron's departure, I had done

that worthy gentleman much wrong. He was at once too kind and conscientious to leave me friendless, and a few weeks before he was to sail in the *Siren* sloop announced his intentions regarding me.

‘I can scarce believe that the English in Bengal are completely ruined, Rob,’ he began, ‘though they deserve no better fate. By the help of Providence and Clive, I think we may weather the storm, always provided the committees of Madras and Fulta do not wreck the ship by their absurd jealousies and squabbles for precedence. Now in the event of Clive setting us on our feet again, be sure he will do it in a grand manner. The conqueror of Arcot is of the stamp of your antique heroes, and does everything on a large scale. So in the case of success there will be chances for a daring young fellow like yourself; and it is on this account that I mean to leave you in Bengal, though I at one time thought of taking you back to England with me.’

‘Oh, sir!’ I gasped, my heart beating a hundred to the minute.

‘Heavens, how the boy’s eyes sparkle! And you would like to go back to England, and challenge Mr. Lestrangle to mortal combat, and ride off with his

blood upon your coat-sleeve to woo his widow? No, Bob; I have considered your story, and do not see that a return yonder would do you any good, while I am sure you may profit by remaining here.'

'I will do whichever you please, sir,' I answered with, I fear, an almost sullen resignation.

'Wisely spoken, Robert; and now for my plans. Your knowledge of the languages renders you a very valuable coadjutor to any man in a public post. I wrote some time ago to Watts, who is just now a kind of State prisoner at Chinsurah, telling him of my intention to return to England, and recommending you to his service in the same capacity you have held with me. Any fortunate change in our affairs will of course restore him to power; and in the meantime I have no doubt he is busy in some secret manner, since he has a rare talent for diplomacy. As I expected, he promptly accepts the transfer, and if you are content to be confidential secretary to Mr. Watts, instead of to John Zephaniah Holwell, the post is ready for you.'

I thanked Mr. Holwell heartily for his consideration, and was very glad thus to obtain my release from Fulta, and to proceed as best I might up the river to Chinsurah, which station I reached early in

December. Here I found Mr. Watts established, in a very doubtful frame of mind as to the prospects of the Honourable East India Company in Bengal ; though he knew that Admiral Watson, with a small armament, was on his way to our rescue, and that, after much squabbling of committees and jealousy of brother-officers, Robert Clive had been finally accredited with full powers for the delivery of the English out of the hands of Suraja Doulah.

CHAPTER VII.

CLIVE TO THE RESCUE !

THE pains of disappointed avarice had embittered the tyrant's success at Calcutta. The pitiful condition of the treasury, and the limited amount of merchandise which could be realized for the royal plunderer after the daring depredations of his soldiery, had been a death-blow to his hopes. The native inhabitants of Calcutta had all contrived to make off with their treasures while the Soubah's army was on the road to the city, with the exception of the ill-fated Omichund; and the only prize in the shape of private fortune swallowed by the royal maw was forty thousand rupees and a variety of valuable effects belonging to this Gentoo merchant. Thus, that English caution which had imprisoned Omichund on the eve of the siege had thrown this large amount into the lap of our worst enemy.

Disgusted beyond all measure with the poverty of

Calcutta, where he had perhaps expected a booty as great as Nadir Shah carried away from imperial Delhi, the Soubahdar consigned the governorship of the Fort of Ally to the Gentoo Manickchund, turned his royal back upon his conquest, and departed in search of new victories. In the month of October he achieved a rapid conquest of a rebellious relation, the Phoujdar of Purneah, and having seen this youth slaughtered, and his country reduced to submission, returned in triumph to Muxadavad, where he expressed himself convinced of our complete annihilation, assuring his low-born favourites that we were a very beggarly set of people, and that the whole of Europe did not contain ten thousand men.

From this blissful state of ignorance Suraja Doulah was disturbed by the news that Robert Clive and Admiral Watson had retaken Calcutta by force of arms, after a vain attempt to obtain its peaceful surrender from Manickchund. It had been almost a bloodless victory, for the might of Mahometan arms had fled panic-stricken at the aspect of British men-of-war, with British soldiers on board them, brightening the broad river with an awful glory, while to landward sounded the roar of Colonel Clive's artillery.

This capture had been achieved after a spirited skirmish in a green hollow, close by a deserted village of mud-huts, within a mile and a half of Buz-buzia, where the English were surprised asleep by Manickehund and his army. This surprise might have proved fatal for the English arms, had a lesser spirit than Clive's ruled the fortunes of the day. The men had dragged two field-pieces and a tumbril of ammunition through a swampy country, and had arrived at this halting-place, after a sixteen hours' march, worn-out with fatigue, and entirely ignorant of the enemy's vicinity.

Happily, Clive and British valour prevailed against strength and numbers immeasurably superior, and a ball chancing to come unpleasantly close to Governor Manickchund's turban, that distinguished Hindoo turned his elephant's head, and the whole army went lumbering back through swamp and jungle to the fort named in veneration of the god whose shrine was so soon to be overthrown.

The 1st of January, 1757, witnessed the taking of Calcutta by Watson and Clive, a noble New-Year's gift, which the Colonel offered to the Directors of the East India Company, and for which, with all other benefits from the same daring hand, they

showed themselves ungrateful in the future. Some ill-feeling was displayed between the naval and military heroes on this occasion, Admiral Watson allowing Clive to be rudely repulsed from the fort which he had helped to capture, and Clive asserting his own rights with his usual spirit.

The English flocked back to their once flourishing settlement to find a scene of desolation. The best houses had been demolished, or damaged by fire. A Moorish mosque, built with the materials of ruined English habitations, defaced the fort; all the prosperous native inhabitants had fled from the rapacity of Manickchund, and squalid poverty prevailed in every quarter. The private losses of inhabitants were roughly estimated at two millions.

Before January was over, Clive and his army, supported by the naval force, had taken Hooghly, a wealthy Moorish city, close to Chinsurah, whose inhabitants had been thrown into consternation by the capture of Calcutta, and were ill-prepared to resist a foe they had begun to consider invincible, so speedily do these Mahometans change from insolence to cowardice. We heard the cannon roaring as the ships battered the fort, and at nightfall were gladdened by the news of victory. This conquest

gave the English army a handsome booty, and must have awakened the Soubahdar from his pleasant delusion respecting the insignificance of European arms.

Hooghly was scarce taken when news of the declaration of war between England and France arrived from Aleppo. These tidings Mr. Watts considered to the last degree alarming, and at once hastened to Calcutta, taking me with him, in order to be present at the meetings of the select committee. These gentlemen expected that the French forces at Chandernagore would at once join the Nabob, as it was well known that the ambitious Bussy thirsted for the extirpation of the English from Bengal, and for that extension of French empire which had been the daring dream of Dupleix.

Impressed with the belief that even British valour would be powerless against the combined forces of Suraja Doulah and Bussy, Clive at once wrote to Juggat Séth, the great Gentoo banker at Muxadavad, requesting his mediation with the Soubahdar, with a view to arranging a peace. Tidings of the capture of Hooghly happened, however, to reach the council-chamber at the same time as this pacific overture, and the mediator found the tyrant frantic with rage against the English plunderers who had sacked his

town, and eager for an instantaneous march to Calcutta.

Hither he hurried, while Clive, hearing of his approach, made prompt preparations to receive him, and at once encamped his forces in a strong position on the outskirts of the settlement. To the native mind the very tidings of the Soubahdar's march carried panic. Neighbouring villages refused to send us our usual supplies, Bengalese troops deserted. We had but few bullocks for draught, and but one horse in the whole settlement, and he a stranger, brought from Madras.

Sorely doubtful of success, and as prudent as he was bold, Colonel Clive now wrote to the Nabob, inviting him to peaceful negotiation. The Nabob replied with vast cordiality, but continued his progress; and at daybreak on the 3rd of February the flames of burning villages reddened the sky to the northward, and the flash of arms and sound of barbarous music announced the approach of the Soubahdar's army.

Suraja Doulah encamped in Omichund's garden, leaving two-thirds of his army on the other side of the ditch, while the remaining third of his forces took possession of a raised causeway that crossed

the Morattoo ditch, and thus led into the Company's territory. When I perceived their position I could but wonder that Colonel Clive had suffered them to seize a post so formidable.

Having pitched his royal tent in Omichund's garden, no doubt at the invitation of the wily Gentoo, the Soubahdah held a durbar in full state. To this council came two of the Company's servants, who were searched by the prince's prime minister, before entering his tent, lest they should carry hidden weapons wherewith to extinguish that light, the Sun of the State.

These two English gentlemen, Mr. Scrafton and Mr. Walsh, found the Nabob surrounded by all his chief officers, and by a circle of scowling rascals of enormous stature, men of low birth, but much affected by the Sun of the State on account of their bulk and ferocious aspect.

These men sat frowning at our deputies throughout the audience; and Mr. Scrafton afterwards told me how he had at this juncture recalled to mind the murderous plot by which this young man's grand-uncle, Allaverdy, had beguiled the Morattoo general into his tent, there to slay him.

With the ever-present fear of assassination, our

gentlemen ventured to remonstrate with the Nabob for his breach of courtesy in thus entering our settlement while he was beguiling Colonel Clive with offers of peace, and then handed his Mahometan highness a paper stating the proposals of the Company. This the Nabob perused in gloomy silence, and anon dismissing the assembly, after some rather alarming whispering between himself and his officers, bade our deputies repair to the tent of his prime minister, there to await a more private conference.

‘Egad, Ainsleigh,’ said Mr. Scrafton, as he related the adventure to me next day, ‘I had a sensation as of cold water trickling down my back the whole time I was in the yellow-faced heathen’s presence, and I think had you seen those truculent scoundrels of his glaring at us from under their enormous turbans, you’d scarce wonder at our distaste for the situation. As we left the tent, that Gentoo rogue Omichund whispered us to take care of ourselves, with a look that I shall never forget. Once safe outside the Nabob’s tent, you may be sure we did not go to the prime minister’s. The invitation sounded too much like the farmer’s wife’s “Dilly, dilly, come and be killed.” We bade our black servants extinguish the torches with which they had escorted us, preferring

the shelter of darkness to so dangerous a distinction, made off for Perrin's redoubt as fast as we could scamper, and thence in safety to the camp.'

It was the report of these two gentlemen that decided Colonel Clive upon an immediate attack; and about three o'clock in the morning of the 5th he marched out with the chief part of his force, assisted by five or six hundred seamen, who drew the artillery and carried ammunition. At six the English entered the enemy's camp in a thick fog. Had this fog cleared off after they had made themselves masters of the camp, the colonel would doubtless have successfully executed his bold design, which was to make his first assault upon a train of heavy artillery, spike the guns, and push straight forward to the Nabob's headquarters. But the fog thickening to a dense impenetrable darkness, threw our men into confusion, and Clive had a sharp contest with a strong body of the enemy, from which he withdrew the poorer by two field-pieces and an eighth of his small army. Yet, so poor a thing was this degenerate descendant of the hardy Tartar general, Allaverdy, that a skirmish, which Clive considered a defeat, struck terror to his craven spirit. He looked upon this night-attack on his camp as

the extreme of desperate valour, and, while shivering in his jewelled shoes, roundly abused his officers for their arrant cowardice. His own losses had been indeed far greater than ours, many officers of distinction, with six hundred common soldiers, five hundred horses, four elephants, some camels, and innumerable bullocks, having perished in the struggle. It was with difficulty this cowardly prince, whose host of forty thousand strong could not sustain him against Clive and two thousand, was induced to spend a second night in such dangerous quarters. His whole army were on the watch from sunset to sunrise, and an incessant firing of cannon and small arms was kept up as a precautionary measure, lest we should again run our raid upon this host of Moorish heroes. It is strange how these eastern soldiers take their colour from the captain who leads them, and that the men who could achieve wonders of valour under grim old Allaverdy, prove the veriest cravens when a craven commands them. A Nadir Shah has but to plant his banner on Persia's barren mountains, and a host of conquerors arise at his call. A Clive takes a handful of sepoy, and the Moorish legions shrivel like the jungle foliage before the rush of a conflagration. What is this subtle

spirit of the master-mind which can thus infect battalions, this wondrous Promethean spark that from the breath of one man's nostrils can fire an army? Yet, when some man like Clive has made our arms victorious, there is always a little knot of cavillers ready to dispute his claim to praise or reward, while some small evening paper, the oracle of coffee-house macaronies, must have its little vapid sneer at the hero's achievements. I lived to see Robert Clive hated because, while pouring millions into the coffers of the East India Company, he had contrived to make his own fortune. I lived to read the complaint of one fine gentleman that, while the Roman conquerors were content with a garland of oak-leaves, our Indian hero had secured a handsome income. I lived to see that man who redeemed India from the hands of our mortal enemies turn indignantly upon his interrogators of the House of Commons, and tell them that had he been a sheep-stealer they could scarce have questioned him more insolently.

This is a long digression ; but when I remember what I saw Robert Clive achieve in Bengal, and consider his experience of a commercial nation's gratitude, I am apt to grow warmer than becomes the writer of a sober chronicle such as this.

CHAPTER VIII.

FAST AND LOOSE.

THE tables were now turned, and the Nabob as eager for peace as he had been insolently neglectful of our advances. Swift was his retirement from the city whose capture six months before had so swelled his pride. The forty thousand black soldiers, with their train of elephants and camels, their herds of draught-oxen, their cymbals and clarions and gay barbaric banners, turned right-about-face, and made the best of their way homewards.

A treaty was concluded, giving the English all they asked—the restoration of their factories, with such effects and moneys as had been brought to account in the books of the Nabob's government, the permission to fortify Calcutta, and the confirmation of all those privileges obtained by Mr. Hamilton, the English surgeon, from the Emperor Ferokhsere.

Such was the happy result of Clive's bold invasion of the enemy's quarters.

While the Nabob's ponderous army was still on the road, a present of costly native dresses arrived for Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive, according to the custom of this country, together with a proposal of alliance offensive and defensive against all enemies. This was precisely what the select committee and Colonel Clive desired, since Bussy's late successes in the Carnatic had brought the French power dangerously near to Bengal, where they already possessed a considerable force at their settlement in Chandernagore. The Nabob's offerings were therefore accepted with all courtesy, and as much affection as if the one hundred and twenty-six unhappy creatures who perished miserably in the Black Hole prison had never been upon the face of this earth. Such Christian-like forgiveness and oblivion of past wrongs is doubtless a necessary element of state policy ; yet while this alliance was making I could not but remember one unfinished ditch of the ravelin, into which an undistinguishable heap of corpses had been cast without so much as a murmured 'requiescant in pace' from any Christian lips.

A handsome monument now surmounts that

common burial-place of so much virtue, valour, and promise; but at this time of which I write the murders of the 20th of June were yet un-avenged; nor did it seem any one's special business to avenge them. Indeed, I think this iniquitous sacrifice of life will make more impression on the minds of mankind in the pages of history than it ever produced on the inhabitants of Calcutta, many among whom I encountered some ten years afterwards who had not so much as heard the story of our sufferings on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

In my position as Mr. Watts's private secretary, I was present at an interview in which Colonel Clive expressed himself freely upon the subject of our European enemies.

'It is a question whether the French or the English are to be masters of Bengal,' said the Colonel, whose face always darkened when he spoke of our famous rivals. 'Be sure, Watts, there are no bounds to the ambition of Bussy; and if once he leaves the Carnatic he will make himself master of Suraja Doulah, who is as weak as he is cruel. Be sure of that. I trust this Mahometan tyrant about as much as I would trust a tiger I had just wounded. So long as the brute can scarce crawl he is at our

feet ; but give him power to spring, and he will be at our throats. His pledges of alliance will be cast to the winds if once he has Bussy's men at his back. He owes the French no grudge, you see, for they have not made him bite the dust as we have ; and he is too short-sighted to consider that their conquests in the Carnatic would be repeated here at his expense. Rely on it, the time has come for decisive action. We must not suffer ourselves to be hoodwinked by a weak-minded boy's cunning. Chandernagore must fall.'

No time was lost in preparing the ground. Omichund, who had been taken once more into favour with the English, was despatched at once to the Nabob, as the most suitable person to sound him upon the subject of an early attack on the French settlement, which would be impossible after the setting-in of the southern monsoon.

Omichund returned by-and-by with a somewhat unsatisfactory account of the Nabob, who could not be brought to give a straight and clear assent to our wishes. He, however, affected excessive friendliness, requested that Mr. Watts might be appointed the Company's deputy at Muxadavad, and asked the loan of twenty English gunners to serve in his own

artillery,—a trick intended to blind us to his treachery, as we had afterwards good reason to know.

This conduct of the Nabob's caused Mr. Watts to depart at once for Muxadavad, I going in attendance upon him. I think there can be little doubt the tyrant selected my new patron on account of his somewhat mild and peaceable temper, which had permitted the too easy surrender of Cassimbazar, an act that must needs have impressed the Nabob with an idea of Mr. Watts's weakness. He had before long reason to see with how perfect a heroism these placable natures can sometimes confront mortal danger.

Now followed a wearisome series of intrigues—a tangled skein, the threads of which passed through my hands. Omichund, who now affected an eager desire to serve the Company, had accompanied us to the capital, a vast and wealthy city, as populous as and much richer than London, but boasting little splendour of architecture, and no attraction in the matter of cleanliness. The streets are close and narrow, the drainage abominable; and while commercial enterprise and Oriental luxury combine to render the city a wonderful one, this populous

capital has little beauty wherewith to captivate the eye of a European traveller.

When I had last visited the city it was as a prisoner in irons, scarce able to drag my tortured limbs to the shed where I was to lie. I came now under vastly different circumstances, and was luxuriously lodged with my patron in a house near the palace, and on the banks of the river, whence I went to the council-chamber very often, to carry letters and assist as interpreter at some solemn interview.

It would be idle to enter closely into the details of an intrigue which might seem trivial to the reader, though to us of life-and-death interest. The permission to attack Chandernagore was given and retracted many times; and it was obvious to Mr. Watts and myself that the friendship of the Nabob was with our enemies, and not with us. It was only after the receipt of a threatening letter from Admiral Watson, wherein the sturdy English sailor swore he would kindle such a blaze in Bengal as all the waters of the Ganges should not quench, that Suraja Doulah gave a reluctant consent to the siege. Even this tardy concession was no sooner yielded than it was revoked; but too late. The Admiral and the Colonel laughed at the revocation as an

insolent folly; bigger vessels than had ever been seen so high up the river were brought from Calcutta and laid alongside the batteries of Chandernagore, while Clive had prepared the way for a naval victory by disabling the enemy's guns. It was no doubtful conquest. The French surrendered at discretion, and were treated with much generosity.

The fall of Chandernagore struck new terror to the coward soul of the Nabob, and increased by tenfold his secret anger against us. But this was no moment in which to show his teeth, since at this very time came the news that an army of Patans—that fearless and hardy race before whose audacity the greatest captains of the East have quailed—were marching upon his province of Behar. So the prince wrote complimentary letters to the Admiral and the Colonel, and treated Mr. Watts with unusual courtesy. He further evinced his friendship by offering Chandernagore to the English on the same terms as it had been enjoyed by the French; but he did not remove a division of his army which he had sent to Plassey, on the island of Cassimbazar, thirty miles from Muxadavad. In a word, he played fast and loose with us; and while protesting his fidelity, and pledging himself to protect our

interests, he encouraged the French, whom we had beaten, to remain in Bengal, wrote secret letters to M. Law, the chief of the French factory at Cassimbazar, and languished for the coming of Bussy. We had shown ourselves his masters, and he hated us with a savage hatred.

It was not till this fact was patent, and the Soubah, in a fit of ungovernable rage, had threatened to impale Mr. Watts—a threat which my patron heard with supreme coolness—that we began to give ear to the hints of Omichund, who was a daily attendant at the Nabob's durbar, and had ears to hear the lowest whisper of intrigue, and a nose to scent the faintest breath of treason. This subtle scoundrel informed us that Suraja Doulah was detested as much as he was feared, even by his own chief officers, and scarce loved by the low favourites whose base-born feet he had allowed to trample on the necks of Moorish gentlemen..

‘Why should the English wait and pray for my lord’s consent to extirpate their enemies?’ he asked of Mr. Watts. ‘Why should they hang upon his looks and exist by his pleasure; to be threatened one day with death, and the next caressed and complimented, with treachery more fatal than death?’

At Calcutta last year the English were weak, very weak; but they are strong to-day. Have they not Sabat Jung, the firm in war, as their leader? and whom shall they fear? It is no longer the time to crouch and crawl; the hour has come for them to strike. The Nabob is hated by all; yes, by all. He has imprisoned Manickchund, and made him pay a million of rupees for such poor profits as he may have obtained in Calcutta.' (Here my gentleman made a piteous face, as in compassion for his brother Gentoo, who was of his own kidney.) 'He has offended Meer Jaffier; and in any contest between those two the army will stand by their paymaster and general. He has degraded his treasurer, Roydoulub, by subjecting him to the authority of his low favourite, Moonlol. The Séths fear him, though to them he is civil; for they know his greedy nature, and that it can scarce be long before his clutch shall fasten on their gold. Yar Khan Latty, an officer of some renown, is fast friends with the Séths. He has two thousand horse under his command. The Nabob must march with the chief part of his army against the Patans; he has sworn to exterminate the English on his return. Let Sabat Jung, your colonel, strike the first blow; and let the English

join Yar Khan Latty, seize Muxadavad, and proclaim Latty Nabob. He will give them all favours they choose to ask. Give them? He will be their servant to do their bidding, if it were the surrender of half his kingdom.'

Thus argued Omichund, doubtless tempted by splendid promises from Latty and the Séths, and ever ready to sell his soul to the highest bidder.

It was about this time that I ventured to speak to the old Gentoo upon the subject of his domestic bereavements. I found him very calm; but he displayed more feeling than I had expected to see in one who had so abandoned himself to the worship of Mammon. When I told him of his granddaughter's safety he was deeply moved, and thanked and blessed me with much agitation, and promised me a noble present. This, however, he contrived to forget; nor should I have cared to accept a rupee from his secret stores, so deep a contempt had I for his sordid nature, and so little faith in his sincerity.

He told me that Juggernaut Sing, his head jemadar, the wretch who had slaughtered thirteen unoffending women, was a distant kinsman of his own, a man of equal piety and courage; and it was

evident from the whole tenor of his discourse that he considered the bloody act of this fanatical murderer excusable, if not laudable.

‘Juggernaut is now at Calcutta,’ he said, ‘but just recovered from his wounds. He has a ferocious hate of the English ; and it is but to please me he can be brought to live peaceably among them.’

I remembered the ghastly face and blood-stained mantle of the man I had seen leading our enemies against Fort William, and the savage yell of rapture with which he had betrayed our weakest points to the foe.

At Omichund’s request I wrote to Mr. Witherington, with whose family his granddaughter was now living at Calcutta, begging him to find some means of sending her safely to Muxadavad.

In something more than a week the damsel arrived, having travelled by water ; but on going to the landing-place to meet her I found the old man there before me. He had been on the watch for her during the last three days. He had a litter waiting, into which he hurried his granddaughter before she could speak a word to me. But when the bearers had carried her off to his house he lingered to thank me once more for her safety.

‘You have redeemed an old man from desolation, and have given him a fresh object in life,’ he said; ‘Omichund may yet leave great-grandchildren behind him to inherit his wealth—if the Nabob should ever pay me the compensation he has promised for my losses in Calcutta,’ he added hastily.

I could scarce refrain from a smile at this, for I knew the Nabob had already paid this Gentoo miser half the promised compensation.

‘You would perhaps have liked to speak to the maiden,’ he said presently; ‘but it is better not. She has already lost caste by her intercourse with your people, and, for the bigoted amongst us, is a pariah. But I have lived among English merchants, and learned to regard these things less strictly. There was once a time in which the wives and daughters of Hindostan mingled freely among strangers; but the Mahometans have taught us to distrust our women, and to hide the brightness of our homes.’

With this he departed; and by-and-by, as I walked homewards through the narrow streets, sweltering in the hot breeze of noontide, I looked wistfully at the closed shutters of the merchant’s dwelling, behind which my tender little Hindoo maid was per-

chance watching. No, I had never loved her. That one pale English face, enshrined in my heart of hearts, was an image not to be blotted out by all the hours of Ind :—but she had loved me ; and a man must be made of a hard material who has not some chance moment of dangerous tenderness for the girl who has loved him in vain.

It was with a feeling of extreme pain that I heard, a few weeks after this, the tidings of Juggernaut Sing's arrival in Muxadavad, and of a marriage between him and his master's granddaughter. It seems that the Brahmins, to whom the fanatic youth had confessed and defended his deed of slaughter, had approved the crime ; and Omichund did not shrink from bestowing his grandchild upon the man whose hands were red with her mother's blood. But what human affection can be expected from a people whose devilish creed teaches them to cast their babes beneath the murderous wheels of Juggernaut, and make a family of children motherless by the burning alive of an unoffending widow ?

Of the poor girl's feelings I scarce dared think ; and when I remembered our friendly companionship at Fulta, and the tender devotion with which she had watched my sick-bed, my heart bled sorely for her

griefs. Had it been possible to have saved her in any desperate manner from a fate to my mind so terrible, I would have hazarded the attempt ; but Mr. Watts's counsel and my own reflections alike convinced me that her rescue was impossible.

CHAPTER IX.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

WHILE Omichund's intrigue with Khan Latty was yet in the bud, a new and much more important pretender presented himself in the person of Meer Jaffier, commander-in-chief of the Nabob's forces, a man of years and experience, who had stood high in the estimation of Allaverdy, and to whom that wise ruler had given his sister in marriage. An Armenian called Petrus, a man that had been employed as a messenger between ourselves and Suraja Doulah in the negotiations of February last past, now came to Mr. Watts on behalf of Meer Jaffier, who declared himself pushed to rebellion in sheer self-defence, since he never entered the durbar but with the dread of being assassinated. Meer Jaffier was ready to promise anything, and Mr. Watts made haste to acquaint Clive with his offers, whereupon there com-

menced a revolution destined to end most happily for our English interests.

I will not follow all the windings and intricacies of this eastern plot and counterplot. Subtlety and falsehood were the order of the day, and the Nabob alternated between loud-spoken distrust and smooth-tongued conciliation of ourselves and Meer Jaffer, who played his cards, however, with extraordinary skill, and contrived to fool his weak master to the very last. It was a period of incessant letter-writing between Mr. Watts at Muxadavad and the select committee at Calcutta, and my post of secretary was a laborious one, leaving little time in which to think of private troubles and anxieties. So critical indeed was our situation, that there were many nights on which my patron and I lay down to rest not knowing whether we should be alive in the morning. It was very well for the gentlemen at Calcutta to be easy as to the result of our intrigue: we were in the lion's den, and knew that in any luckless hour the brute's ravenous jaws might open to devour us. I am happy to say, however, that we faced all dangers coolly, and asserted the interests of our honourable masters with as calm a front as if we had been safe in the council-chamber of Leadenhall Street.

The Nabob's army was still encamped at Plassey, while Clive, by the advice of Meer Jaffier's party, had withdrawn his forces to Calcutta, the better to lull the tyrant into a false security. But Suraja Doulah, by nature the most cowardly of mankind, was a prey to perpetual suspicions, now turning upon us, now upon Meer Jaffier, as ready to cringe as to assassinate, and knowing not whom to trust or whom to destroy. His spies lurked in every quarter of the province, and traded alike upon his fears and his ignorance; one day making him believe that the English army lay concealed in the factory of Cassimbazar, and the next deluding him with the hope that a French fleet was about to ravage Madras.

Urged by his ever-increasing fear of Clive, he sought a reconciliation with Meer Jaffier, whom he had lately treated with the utmost ignominy, and sent him, with fifteen thousand men, to reinforce his prime minister, Roydoulub, at Plassey. Meer Jaffier, afraid to refuse, was thus compelled to leave Muxadavad while the plot was hatching, but left his agent Petrus behind, in daily, and sometimes hourly, correspondence with my patron, Mr. Watts.

The articles were now drawn up which were to pledge Meer Jaffier in the event of his success,

They were to include all that had been promised by Suraja Doulah, and one clause of extreme advantage to the English, whereby the future Nabob agreed to pay a sum of money sufficient to make good all the losses which had been sustained by the Company and by individuals at the taking of Calcutta. Meer Jaffier, with the generosity of an adventurer who has as yet nothing to lose and all things to gain, readily agreed to these articles, but stipulated that the plot should be kept secret from that Gentoo intriguer, Omichund.

This last condition was perplexing. The old man had been hanging upon our footsteps ever since he had broached the subject of Yar Khan Latty's pretensions, and had pressed us closely for a definite answer. For some time he had, I know, suspected us, too well versed in the art of prevarication to be deluded by an Englishman's less subtle falsehoods. He came in upon us suddenly, on the very day after Petrus brought us Meer Jaffier's message, livid with rage, and told us that we had been trifling with him, and that he knew the secret game we were playing.

Of all men about the Soubahdar's court this was the one whose influence my patron most dreaded. He saw that Omichund knew something of our

secret, and that to obey Meer Jaffier's desire would be to provoke his vengeance. After binding him to secrecy he therefore confided the details of our enterprise, which Omichund heard with pretended approval. But I had now known this old man for some years, and had made a close study of his countenance. I watched him attentively throughout this conversation, and saw quite enough to assure me that he did not forgive us for the endeavour to deceive him, and that in his heart of hearts he cherished a most malignant hatred of us.

Soon after this came news from Calcutta of the arrival of a messenger from Hyderabad, a stranger called Govinderoy, who brought a letter purporting to be written by Ballajee-Rao, the general of the Morattoes, offering to invade Bengal with a hundred and twenty thousand men within six weeks after he should receive the invitation of the English governor. The letter was suspected to be a trap set for us at the instigation of Suraja Doulah ; and Clive, ever ready in expedients, advised the committee to forward the letter to the Nabob, affecting a belief in its authenticity. By this means, should the letter be indeed a trick, the tables would be turned upon the trickster ; while, if it were genuine, no act could

be more adapted to soothe him into a confidence in our friendship.

The treaty which Mr. Watts and myself had sketched out with infinite pains and very close calculations was now submitted to the committee at Calcutta. The sum therein demanded for the restitution of all losses amounted in all to seventeen millions of rupees; but this sum, large as it appears, did not seem sufficient to the gentlemen of the Calcutta committee, who cherished an extravagant notion of the wealth in Suraja Doulah's treasury, an idea founded rather on the mythical wonders of the 'Arabian Nights' than on the possible revenues of the tyrant, whose predecessor's reign had been one of constant turmoil and expenditure.

Determined that Meer Jaffier should pay for his elevation, the committee asked a donation of five million rupees for the squadron and army, while Mr. Watts was also recommended to request a handsome tribute for each of the gentlemen of the committee.

These preliminaries being settled, we awaited the final blow, not without a terrible uncertainty of mind; for the spies of Suraja Doulah slept not, and the shadow of death hovered very near us during this most critical period.

CHAPTER X.

OMICHUND THROWS OFF THE MASK.

THE time was now come in which the Gentoo deceiver, Omichund, was to reveal himself for the first time in his true colours. I have already described the lurking doubt which had ever been entertained of his sincerity by Mr. Holwell and myself, and afterwards by Mr. Watts ; but he was now to throw off the mask, and boldly declare himself a villain.

It was when matters were at the most perilous crisis—the Nabob's army encamped at Plassey fifty thousand strong, and Clive prepared to march from Calcutta so soon as the treaty was signed—that this avaricious scoundrel came one morning to my patron, and rudely insisted upon an interview. His usual cringing manner was exchanged for an audacity which threatened mischief. He began at once to talk of the confederation, and our hopes of success.

‘I have come fresh from the durbar, Mr. Watts,’ he said, ‘and the countenance of the Nabob was not pleasant to look on. He has spies, saheb, many spies; and he suspects. It needs but one word, one hint of the truth in his ear, and before the echo of the voice that spoke it had died away in the hall of his palace, the messengers of death would be on their way hither. Have you ever considered that the game we are playing is one in which we stake our heads?’

‘I have never esteemed my life especially safe in this country,’ my patron answered with admirable coolness. ‘But what does this preface mean, my good Omichund?’

‘It means that if you, saheb, hold your life at a trifle, I set some value on mine, and expect a handsome recompense for the mortal peril which I have undergone daily, hourly, within the last month, in the service of your people at Calcutta.’

‘You cannot suppose that your services will go unrewarded.’

‘I do not know that. When I served you a year ago—as I did, faithfully—your people at Calcutta rewarded me with a prison. They made me a prisoner, saheb, for a groundless suspicion; and while

the rest of my countrymen had ample leisure to decamp with all their possessions, my hard-earned wealth was sacrificed : and that I owe to the English. The women of my household were slaughtered : that also do I owe to the English. Yet these bitter wrongs do I forget, when Sabat Jung has given you back your settlement, and I try to serve you—because, though they have ill-used me, I believe the English are faithful, and will keep promise or treaty that they make. My fortunes are broken, and I am labouring to restore them. I have served you well, saheb, and there have been many times when the Nabob would have had you slain without mercy had he not been beguiled by me to trust you a little longer. To do this, I have risked my life daily, and shall continue in the same peril so long as I remain in this city. I must have my reward. It must be no promise of the lips—a breath which the evening wind blows away. It must be written in the treaty. The reward that I am to have must be written there, in words that no man can misunderstand.'

'Such a proposal is somewhat insulting to your employers,' replied Mr. Watts; 'but I do not suppose the gentlemen of the committee will object to your name being set down in the treaty between them

and Meer Jaffier. Pray at what amount do you estimate your services?’

Omichund smiled in a thoughtful manner before replying to this plain question.

‘I have to remember that without my mediation the Nabob would never have been reconciled to the English. Ever since the capture of Calcutta I have been the secret friend of your countrymen; not because I have reason to love them, but because—nay, saheb, no man is bound to reveal his motives. It is enough that I have served you. ’Twas I who pleaded with Surajah Doulah for the miserable survivors of the 20th of June, and gave them food and shelter at Calcutta, where they might have remained with impunity, but for the folly of an English soldier who killed a Moor in some drunken quarrel, an act that led to the banishment of every Englishman from the settlement. Yes, saheb, I have been your friend, but my experience does not teach me to hope much from British gratitude. I have a better claim to the reward I ask than past services.’

‘What is the nature of that claim, Omichund?’

‘My power to destroy you!’ cried the old traitor, with a sudden energy that struck us dumb. He stood for some moments watching our faces with a malignant grin upon his own. Then slowly extend-

ing his brown skinny hand, he looked downward at the outspread fingers with a smile of triumph. 'See here, saheb,' he said, 'in these fingers I hold the threads of your intrigue. It needs but a motion of my hand and they are entangled hopelessly. In this palm I hold your lives—yours and your secretary's yonder, and the lives of many more—and by the closing of this hand can destroy you. What, gentlemen! how pale you look! And yet I do but remind you of my power; to speak is not to act. Do you think Omichund would betray his patrons—even though they once betrayed him—and though but the other day you sought to fool the poor old Gentoo? No, Mr. Watts, saheb, I do not threaten; I ask only that when others are remembered my reward may not be forgotten.'

'Put your demand in plain figures,' replied Mr. Watts, somewhat coldly; 'I do not comprehend this violent language, nor the looks with which you have accompanied it.'

'The treasury of Bengal is accounted rich, and if Meer Jaffier mounts the musnud, my honourable masters will profit by millions. For my share I claim five per cent. upon the Nabob's treasures in specie, and the fourth part of his jewels.'

This demand was made with a most consummate

coolness of tone and manner, and having thus stated his claim the old Gentoo stood before us with down-cast eyelids and folded hands, the very picture of meek honesty. But beneath the shrivelled lids I could discern the piercing black eyes casting furtive glances at my patron's face. The proposition was so monstrous that Mr. Watts stood for some minutes aghast, more struck by the enormity of this demand than by the iniquity of the threat that had preceded it. Treachery of the blackest hue is so common a thing among these Orientals that the diplomatist must be indeed unversed in their politics who can be surprised by any new revelation of it. But there is a height of impudence more astounding than baseness, and of such impudence this proposal of Omichund's was a flagrant example.

My patron drew a long breath, and after that first movement of surprise refrained from any expression of his feelings.

'My good Omichund,' he began quietly, 'I thought your commercial experience would have saved you from the folly of so childish a proposal. You ask five per cent. on the Nabob's money—a fourth of his jewels! Are you aware that the jewels alone are rated at forty-five millions sterling?'

‘Yes, saheb; by children and fools. The royal jewels are worth four-and-a-half millions at most.’

‘And of this amount you would claim a fourth?’

‘Yes, saheb,’ replied the Gentoo, with a grave reverence of his head, and with the sober air of an honest tradesman who respectfully defends a disputed charge in his bill.

‘Well, my good friend, you cannot be accused of neglecting your interests, or rating your services at too low a figure,’ said Mr. Watts with his easiest air; ‘and I thank you for your candour. But you see I have no real authority in this business. I am here only as a mouthpiece and communication for the gentlemen at Calcutta. I will refer your demands to the select committee there in my next letter, and we shall see how they treat them.’

‘You do not think the gentlemen at Calcutta will refuse my claim, saheb?’ asked Omichund, with a somewhat sinister look.

‘I cannot venture a guess as to their reply; but I am sure they will do whatever they consider just and liberal.’

‘And the treaty, saheb? The sum to be paid to me must be set forth in a special clause of the treaty.’

Let the gentlemen at Calcutta understand I will be satisfied with nothing less than that.'

'I will tell them as much. You are now at liberty to leave us, Omichund.'

The old man honoured us each with a profound reverence, and quitted the chamber. We heard him groan faintly as he put on his shoes and shuffled away on the smooth marble pavement—a groan as of lamentation over the iniquity of the English.

My patron walked to the doorway, looked into the corridor to make sure there was no spy lurking without, and then returned to me with a very grave expression of countenance.

'Robert Ainsleigh,' he said, 'if you set any value upon your life, you must leave this place to-night.'

'Why, sir?'

'Because the Calcutta committee will refuse to accede to that scoundrel's extortionate demands, and, so surely as they do, he will betray you and me to Suraja Doulah. To-night you can leave this place unsuspected as the bearer of a letter to Calcutta; a few nights hence flight may be impossible.'

'And you think that I would leave you, sir, in such a time of danger? No, if I valued existence at its utmost price, I do not believe I could be so

base as that ; and my life is not a treasure that I care to defend. Let them impale me to-morrow, and there is scarce a creature living to lament my fate. I thank you heartily for your consideration, sir ; but, by your leave, I will remain to see the end of the play, whether it prove a comedy or a tragedy.'

'I fear the last act will be bloody, Robert.'

'It cannot be worse than the Black Hole, sir. But surely, with Colonel Clive at our back, we may master this Gentoo scoundrel? Cannot the committee finesse the question of his claim?'

'I doubt their power to do so. Satan himself is not more versed in guile than this Gentoo plotter. You see he declines at the outset to accept any verbal pledge. He will have his reward set down in the treaty to be signed, sealed, and delivered between ourselves and Jaffier. I can see no safety, Robert, but in compliance ; and I do not believe that the committee would comply. We have already pushed our demands upon Jaffier to the utmost limit ; and to ask for nearly another million might be the ruin of our cause. Remember, it would be as easy for Jaffier to ally himself to the French as to us. Bussy is ever ready to adopt any pretender who can promise him an extension of power ; and to provoke Jaffier by

extortionate demands might be to throw him into the arms of our enemies.'

The letter communicating Omichund's demands was written and despatched to Calcutta, and we had but to wait the issue of this affair, and of all other knots and entanglements in the skein of intrigue, with what tranquillity we might. It was on the second night after the despatch of the letter that we received, through a singular channel, a new revelation of this villain's iniquity. The house in which we lived lay on the river-bank, in a small garden that adjoined the splendid grounds of Heraut-jeel, the Nabob's palace, a fortified building surrounded by towers provided with cannon. I was lounging here in the summer darkness, well-nigh worn out by the anxieties and suffocating heat of the day, when a little boat shot along the stream and ran under the bank where I walked. A cloaked and hooded figure, very small and slender, stepped out of the boat and approached me.

I expected to see some youthful dervish come to solicit alms ; but, on drawing quite close to me, the stranger uttered a timid greeting, and I recognized the accents of Tara.

It was but a few weeks since her marriage,

after which event I scarce hoped ever to see her again.

‘Robert, saheb,’ she began—she had learned my Christian name from Mr. Holwell, who never addressed me by any other, and I doubt if she knew that I owned a surname,—‘Robert, saheb, I have come to warn you of a great danger. I have come secretly, with much difficulty; and I think my husband would kill me, as he killed the others, did he know that I could so degrade myself. But can I forget how you saved my life, saheb, or how happy I was on board the English ship when the English doctor said my care had saved yours? No, Robert, saheb, I cannot forget those days; they stand apart from my life. I have no share in their brightness now, and my life seems all dark—so dark that I long to die and pass into a new world, where I shall be purified from my sins, and so pass on through other worlds of purification to the heights of heaven, where the great God is happy for ever among the happy angels who serve him. We have a Brahmin who lives in the house and reads the Shastah to us every day, and his words give me comfort when my heart is heavy.’

‘My darling!’ I involuntarily exclaimed in

English ; and I am happy to think this innocent Hindoo did not understand the import of the word, which she no doubt took to be some term of ceremony ; ‘ alas ! I fear you are not happy ? ’ I continued in Bengalee.

‘ I am as happy as we ought to be in a world of purgation, saheb. But it is not to speak of myself I came hither. You are in danger, you and the other English saheb. My grandfather is angered against you. He says that Mr. Watts and the English mean to cheat him ; but that he will be the death of you all if you play him false. He is not easy in his mind. He is pale, and walks about the house all day, and hurries backwards and forwards to the Nabob’s palace like an evil spirit ; and last night, when he knew not that I was within hearing, I overheard him tell my husband that he and Roydoulub, the Nabob’s treasurer, had sworn to each other to secrete and divide between them a great part of the royal treasure before the new Nabob comes. But that is nothing. It is your life that is in danger, Robert, saheb, and you must leave the city at once. You see how dear your life is to me, when I betray my grandfather for your sake ; but I know that you English sahebs will not hurt the old man.’

This last speech was made in all simplicity, for Tara was innocent as a child. I thanked her heartily for her devotion, but told her that it was impossible for me to leave Muxadavad for some time to come. This so distressed her that I was obliged to temporize, and promise I would fly from the threatened danger, for the dear girl was imperilling her own life by remaining with me, and I was eager to see her return to her home. The boatman who had brought her had been bribed to fidelity by the gift of one of her gold ornaments. This I redeemed from him by a handsome donation, and urged him to conduct her in safety to the garden landing-stage a little way down the river, whence she had come. I have the quaint Indian bangle still amongst my dearest treasures, a memorial of this perilous time and the affection that would fain have protected me from danger.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO TREATIES.

SOME days elapsed before the arrival of a reply to the letter which Mr. Watts had written to Colonel Clive, setting forth in detail the iniquitous demands of Omichund. When Robert Clive's answer did come, I was at the first blush scarcely less astonished by it than I had been by the Gentoo's most impudent demand.

‘I have received your last letter,’ wrote he, ‘and I must confess the tenor of it surprised me much. I immediately repaired to Calcutta, and, at a committee held, both the admirals and gentlemen agree that Omichund is the greatest villain upon earth, and that now he appears in the strongest light, what he was always suspected to be, a villain ingrain. However, to counterplot this scoundrel, and at the same time to give him no room to suspect our intentions, enclosed you will receive two forms of agree-

ment, the one real, to be strictly kept by us, the other fictitious. In short, this affair concluded, Omichund will be treated as he deserves.'

'Well, Ainsleigh,' said Mr. Watts, after he had permitted me to read this letter, 'what do you think of the colonel's plan?'

'It is a bold expedient, sir; but—do you consider it an honourable one?'

'No,' replied my patron, 'between man and man such a trick would be a consummate treachery. But remember that we deal here with nations. Omichund has it in his power not only to betray you and me, but to destroy the English in Bengal.'

'Since we are so completely in his power, sir, would it not be best to give him his price, and suffer him to enjoy his ill-gotten gains, and the ignominy they will carry with them?'

'That is offering a premium to iniquity. You talk like a boy, my dear Ainsleigh. Is a man to make near a million of money by a stroke of treachery the most infamous ever hatched in the mind of a traitor? Were the sum less important, we might consent to his cheating Meer Jaffier, for remember it is from the future Nabob the money is to be plundered. I swear that Clive's notion is a masterstroke of genius.

That man is all genius—in politics or in war he shines alike resplendent. His diplomacy is as intuitive as his military skill. Great heavens—what a man—and he came to Madras scarce thirteen years ago as a clerk !’

‘ Yet I wish with all my heart he had hit upon any other plan than this, sir.’

‘ So do I, Robert ; but you see it is just because there is no other plan possible that this expedient is a masterstroke. That scoundrel pushes us into a corner. “I will have my name in the treaty for close upon a million sterling, or I will betray you,” he says. He shows no mercy, you see ; and we reply, “Very well, you shall have your name in a treaty ;” but we do not say what treaty ; and so the trickster will be nicely tricked. Do not ask me to pity him, Robert. It is but a puling sentiment that can plead for such a harpy. The wretch is rolling in wealth already. He has obtained half the hoarded rupees plundered from his house, and is now trying to extort the other half from Suraja Doulah’s treasury. He will have full restitution of his losses in Calcutta, with the rest of the sufferers, native as well as English, should the revolution succeed. And are you going to plead for him because his treachery

fails to extort an extra million? I tell you the man's greed of gold is a monomania; give him a million to-day, and you will but render him the more eager for another million to-morrow. A fictitious treaty! Yes, Robert, it is the only possible means of securing us from this scoundrel's treachery.'

Reflection convinced me that Mr. Watts was right, and that a situation of peril so exceptional, a traitor so far beyond all common traitors, justified a deceit as desperate as that proposed by Clive. How this act may appear to the judgment of after-ages I know not; but it is scarce possible that the rigid moralists who may point to this deed as a blot upon Robert Clive's character should realize the difficulties of our position at this crisis. I have lived to hear the Colonel's policy in this matter questioned, as almost every other step in the career that gave India to England has been questioned; and to hear his bold justification of the deed. 'I would do it again a hundred times,' he told the Committee of the House of Commons; and though his humanity compassionated the disappointed miser's hapless ending, I think he gloried in the recollection of having successfully cheated so base a cheat.

Conciliated, and half-convinced by the apparent friendliness of the course which Clive had taken with regard to the Morattoo letter—a genuine document, and calculated to alarm his fears—Suraja Doulah at last consented to withdraw his army from Plassey, and Meer Jaffier returned to the capital at the head of his fifteen thousand troops. He was coldly received by the Nabob, whose insolence of manner so alarmed him that he withdrew to his palace in fear and trembling, not knowing what discoveries might have been made by Suraja Doulah during his absence. The frown of a despot is a menace of death, and Meer Jaffier knew the ways of his countrymen too well to be blind to his danger. So fearful was he of exciting suspicion that he refused to confer in private with Mr. Scrafton, whom Colonel Clive had despatched to Muxadavad to explain the particulars of the two treaties, real and fictitious, and would only give him a hurried interview in his public audience-chamber.

All was now prepared for the final blow, and our chief anxiety at this crisis was to get rid of Omi-chund, who, as he had boasted, did but too surely hold the lives of us all in his power, and who at any moment might, by some diabolical chance, get wind

of our intention to deceive him. He was a creature all eyes and ears, a plotter by nature, and so greedy of gain that he would at any moment hazard the chances of our great enterprise in the hope of some immediate profit to himself. He had done this more than once already, by carrying to the Nabob false tales of our designs against him, calculated certainly to throw him off the real scent, but also calculated to keep him in a state of alarm and watchfulness most inimical to our plans.

For such artful inventions Omichund had received either immediate payment, or promises of future reward. We knew not what mischief his lying tongue might do us if he remained longer a hanger-on of the Nabob's council-chamber, and Mr. Watts and Mr. Scrafton laid their heads together to withdraw him to Calcutta.

I think the promise of gain would have tempted him to descend into the Brahminical hell; and when it was made clear to him that there was money to be picked up at Calcutta in payment of his services there, he agreed to return with Mr. Scrafton, and Mr. Watts and myself had the pleasure of seeing him depart in his palanquin in that gentleman's company.

Mr. Scrafton related to us afterwards, with mingled laughter and vexation, the difficulties of his journey—how, on the travellers reaching Cassimbazar, the old Gentoo was missing, and how, on messengers being despatched back to the city in search of him, he was found sitting at midnight in the Nabob's treasury, trying to extort from Mohun Lall, the favourite, some more of the money he had been promised as a reward for his lies about the English. Here the messengers were fain to wait until the harpy had assured himself there was nothing to be extorted from the inflexible Mohun Lall, when they packed him into his palanquin and bore him off in triumph to Cassimbazar, whence they continued their journey at two o'clock in the morning. But at daybreak Mr. Scrafton, awaking from a peaceful slumber, had the mortification to discover that his tiresome charge was again missing, and this time not knowing where to look for him, had no help for it but to wait upon the road-side until three o'clock in the afternoon, when the old man returned from Plassey, whither he had stolen off to confer with Roydoulub, who had told him that no stipulation had been made for him in the negotiations with Meer Jaffier.

Alarmed to the last degree by this assertion, the old plotter pushed Mr. Scrafton with the closest questions; but this gentleman was happily able to baffle him without trouble.

‘You see I had only to tell the old scoundrel the truth,’ he said to us, in relating the adventure; ‘which was that Roydoulub could not possibly know the particulars of the treaty, since Mr. Watts had not yet communicated the ultimate form of the agreement even to Meer Jaffier himself. Convinced by this, he consented to continue his journey, and we jogged on in peace, though I rarely woke from a nap without expecting to miss Omichund’s palanquin, and find he had played me some new trick. At Calcutta he was received with amazing cordiality; but even this could not quite conquer his suspicions, for he was seen in secret conference with our Persian scribe; but this fact luckily reaching the Colonel’s ears, the scribe was employed only to draw up the *fictitious* treaty. Thus, you perceive, if Omichund had bribed the scribe to tell him the contents of the document—which there is little doubt he had done—he would be only the more surely deceived.’

One difficulty, and one only, had transpired in the preparation of this fictitious treaty, and that arose

from Admiral Watson's peremptory refusal to sign it.

'Attach my signature to a lie!' cried the fiery old tar; 'not for the wealth of a hundred treasuries as rich as Suraja Doulah's!'

In vain did Colonel Clive and the other gentlemen of the committee argue the point, and explain the necessity of the case. The sailor was inflexible.

'I don't know what honour may mean among you military and commercial gentlemen,' he said somewhat rudely; 'but if *that* is in your estimation an honourable deed for an Englishman to witness, I must tell you plainly we Jack-tars have a different notion of fair dealing. No, Colonel; you must manage this business without me. I had sooner cut off my hand than sign that paper.'

This is a faithful record of the conversation as it was reported to me. I have since heard it stated that Admiral Watson, though he refused to sign his name to the treaty, gave full consent to his autograph being forged. But even in justification of my favourite Clive, whom I believe to have been a great and good man, I cannot bring myself to credit a statement so opposed to reason. All I can tell is,

that Admiral Watson's signature *was* forged, and the fictitious treaty thus completed.

After the necessary delay caused by the wearisome slowness of Indian travelling,—how different from those wonders of speed, our English stage-coaches, which perform a journey of fifty miles between sunrise and sunset!—a native messenger arrived with the two treaties, the real one written on white paper, the false on red.

And now my patron had to arrange a secret conference with Meer Jaffier, whereat the agreement between him and the English might be executed. This was a matter of no small difficulty. Suraja Doulah's suspicions never slept, and they had been but lately aroused against Meer Jaffier. Any open communication between the latter and ourselves was therefore impossible. After much deliberation, my patron hit on a favourite Oriental stratagem. He ordered his palanquin, and caused himself to be carried to Meer Jaffier's palace, with me in another palanquin, securely shrouded by the silken curtains of the litters, and guarded by our servants, on whose fidelity we could fortunately rely. The palanquins of women are always regarded with respect,

and ours were so arranged as to look like the closely-curtained litters of some eastern beauties. In this guise we were carried straight to the pretender's zenána, where it is likely the breath of slander may have followed us, but we were safe from a suspicion of the truth.

We found Meer Jaffier and his son Meeran alone in the spacious apartment where our bearers deposited us. The elder man seemed to me a shrewd and sagacious person; but in the countenance of the younger I perceived that savageness of nature which he was too soon to exhibit.

An ample explanation took place between Mr. Watts and Meer Jaffier. The latter reluctantly confessed that in all his master's army there were but three thousand horse on whom he could rely, a somewhat small subtraction from an army of fifty thousand. Should the scene of action be this city, Meer Jaffier promised to attack the Nabob's palace at the first signal of strife. Should a battle take place on the plain, his conduct must of course be ruled by the position he might occupy. If in the van, he would advance with drums beating and standard flying at the approach of the English, and pass over to their right with all his men; if in the

rear, he would display a white flag, set upon the main body of the Nabob's army as soon as the English began the attack, and if possible take him prisoner.

These explanations made, Meer Jaffier held a copy of the Koran on his own head with one hand while he laid the other on the head of his son, and with the papers outspread before him, swore, 'by God, and the prophet of God,' to be faithful to the treaty. It was an awe-striking ceremonial, and I wondered, as I beheld it, to think how lightly these Mahometans can break vows so solemn; yet when I bethought myself of those venal wretches who pace Westminster Hall with straws in their shoes, ready to bear false witness for the smallest consideration, I was less inclined to marvel at eastern perfidy.

The messenger who had brought the treaties carried them back to Calcutta; and now my patron's business being concluded at Muxadavad, it was high time that he should consider his personal safety. To this he had shown a noble indifference from first to last; and though he had received several warnings of danger, he had refused to abandon his post until a special letter from Clive should set him at liberty.

For this letter of release he was still waiting when a secret messenger came to us at sunset from Meer Jaffier, bidding us instantly leave the city, as the Nabob's suspicions were now thoroughly aroused, and he might at any moment open fire on the palace of his traitorous commander-in-chief, when doubtless he would also take speedy means to revenge himself upon any English plotters within convenient reach of bowstring or stake.

The warning was of so peremptory a nature that it would have been worse than folly to disregard it. Mr. Watts therefore bade me pack his papers in the smallest compass, and carrying no more than these and a change of linen, we set out at night for the factory at Cassimbazar, as it were on a business visit ; but with the fixed intention to return no more to Muxadavad so long as Suraja Doulah reigned in the palace of Heraut-jeel.

We reached the factory in safety, and there met a messenger carrying the expected letter from Colonel Clive to my patron ; and thus duty and honour were in no way violated by the continuance of our flight. Guided and aided by an Usbeg Tartar, whom Mr. Watts had befriended some years before, we now performed an arduous journey by land and

water, carefully eschewing the main road, upon which the Nabob's emissaries were likely to travel in search of us, and going over a good deal of unnecessary ground in order to keep clear of this dangerous path. And thus on to Culna, where to our great joy we met the English army; and oh, how pleasant a sight it was to us, newly escaped out of the jaws of the eastern lion, to look on the familiar uniforms, and shelter ourselves beneath the victorious flag of that dear free island in the West!

It was now the fourteenth of June. On the twelfth Colonel Clive and the troops that had been in quarters at Calcutta, had set out for Chander-nagore, where the remainder of the army had been left with a hundred and fifty sailors from the fleet, and the next day continued their journey with the whole force, leaving one hundred stalwart Jack-tars as a garrison in the place. The Europeans, artillery, and stores made the journey up the noble Hooghly in boats, while the sepoy marched by the high-road.

In company with this gallant army we travelled pleasantly enough for two days, when we halted at Patlee, an insignificant town, whence Major Coote and a party sallied forth to the attack of the fort at

Cutwah, a strong place garrisoned by a detachment of the Nabob's troops; and here, after a brief skirmish, Providence blessed our arms.

Mr. Watts and myself arrived at Cutwah soon after this victorious attack, and encamped in the plain, where I encountered a surprise which for the time distracted my attention from public affairs and threw me back upon my own insignificant existence, with its many sorrows.

While the army were busy with the work of encamping, Mr. Watts was summoned to an interview with Colonel Clive, who was resting in his tent, with his papers spread out before him, and Major Coote seated by his side, giving him a lively account of the assault upon Cutwah fort. By this means released from attendance on my patron, I strolled among the troops, white and coloured, watching their busy preparations for the night's food and shelter. All were in excellent spirits, for it was a quality of Clive's mind to inspire life and hope in the minds of other men—yes, even of these sepoys, whose language he spoke so poorly, and who seemed to take from the very fire of his glance the spark that transformed them from the venal machines of war to daring and eager soldiers.

Night was fast closing in after the brief twilight of this eastern world, and I was walking somewhat listlessly among the newly-erected tents, when I was startled by the aspect of a face that flashed upon me across the glare of a watch-fire. It was the smoke-blackened countenance of a European soldier, who lay stretched at full length on the ground beside the fire, and it seemed wondrously familiar.

My heart leaped into my throat, and well-nigh choked me. Yes, it was a face that had been familiar to me in my old life—that old unforgotten time in which I had not yet bid good-bye to youth and hope. It was the face of the man with whom I had shared the slow agonies of the Black-Hole prison, whom I had believed dead of that night's torture.

‘Phil!’ I cried, with a ringing shout that startled the party by the watch-fire.

The English soldier leaped to his feet, sprang towards me, and embraced me as if I had been his sweetheart.

‘Why, Robert, I thought thou wert dead!’

‘And I had given you over for one of the hapless wretches buried in the ditch at Fort William on the 21st of June.’

‘No, Bob; I came forth out of that hell alive. By

what instinct I saved myself I know not, for when I dropped from your neck I am sure I was dying. But I think the love of life is extra strong in vagabonds, like the love of drink or of women, or the thirst for an enemy's blood. I faintly remember clambering over the heaps of dead—yes, Bob, indifferent that I trod on corpses—to the mountain of corruption piled on the platform, and there I lay topmost and insensible. Some black Samaritan dragged me out, still half unconscious, and flung me on the grass outside, to die or recover as Fate would have it; and as Fate has constant need of such instruments of mischief as I am, I did recover, escaping with only a touch of rheumatic fever and a scourge of boils, which latter affliction I endured with a most un-Job-like impatience. Recovered from these, I found myself a beggar amongst other beggars in Calcutta, where I must have starved but for the charity of that old Gentoo merchant with whom you statesmen are now so friendly. Here, however, I had the ill-luck to be the death of a Mussulman soldier by a chance blow in a drunken fight—for these Moors drink deep as John Bull himself, if they can but get the forbidden liquor—and was obliged to run for my life, and for two months led a wandering existence, bordering un-

pleasantly near upon starvation ; for these Hindoos, who will do wonders of beneficence for any greasy, unclean wretch with a withered arm, or his finger-nails growing through the palms of his shrivelled hands, have little charity for a decent Englishman. I found more compassion at Chandernagore, where our enemies the French gave me food and shelter, and looked upon me as in a manner canonized by the martyrdom of the Black Hole ; and here I lay until I heard that Clive and Watson were coming to the rescue, when I left my friendly foes, and contrived to join the English at Fulta.'

'And you were at the capture of Calcutta?' I asked.

'Yes, Bob ; and at Hooghly, in the night-attack on the Nabob's camp ; and at the siege of Chandernagore. I have had my fill of fighting, and am a full sergeant, with a prospect of a pair of colours, should Fortune send us a successful issue to this noble rebellion.'

'I wish you good-luck with all my heart, Phil,' said I ; and, having answered his eager questions as to my own adventures since last year, I linked my arm with his, and drew him away from the tents, for he held the key to a secret that was life or death to me.

‘Do you remember what you told me in the Black Hole, Philip Hay?’ I asked solemnly.

‘Yes, Robert Ainsleigh,’ replied he, with mock gravity that ridiculed my earnestness; ‘and be sure what I told you *there* was the truth, for I felt the grip of Death’s bony fingers on my weasand that night, and whatever I said to you was a last dying speech and confession.’

‘You told me that Margery is your wife.’

‘As much as a marriage-service can make her so.’

‘And you sank unconscious at my feet while I was entreating you to tell me the name of the man who holds your marriage certificate.’

‘Likely enough, Bob. I have but a shadowy recollection of that night. The man’s name is Blade—Silas Blade, an attorney in Little Britain. I lodged the certificate with him, in a tin box containing other papers, chiefly letters from my friend and patron Mr. Everard Lestrangle. Deuced cautious letters they were too; but they tell their story nevertheless, and, knowing their value, I took care to put them in safe keeping. You see I always feared mischief from that gentleman; and, as he had shown himself anxious to get both the certificate and the

letters from me, I should have been a very idiot to keep them in my own possession.'

'Philip,' said I, 'you have often acknowledged you did me a cruel injury six years ago.'

'Yes, Bob, I am ready enough to confess that sin.'

'Will you go a step further than confession, and make some atonement for that injury?'

'What atonement can a penniless sergeant of Bengal Infantry offer to a lucky young fellow who has always fallen on his feet, and is now no doubt on the high-road to fortune?'

'If ever I go back to England, Phil, my first desire will be to annul that marriage with Margery. Had the poor child been true to herself, I would have gladly married her, as I told her father. Sure, I loved her as well as ever brother loved sister, and the memory of our happy childhood made her almost holy in my eyes; yet of that love which makes the glory and brightness of marriage there could, at best, have been none between us. But do you think I can peacefully endure the odious link that binds me to Everard Lestrangle's cast-off mistress? No, Philip, *that* tie could never be otherwise than hateful. Loosen it, and I will be a true friend to that poor deluded girl; loosen it, and I will say you

did me no injury when you lent yourself to a plot that robbed me of Dorothea Hemsley.'

'What can I do, Bob, more than I have done towards the loosening of your marriage-tie?'

'Give me your written statement of the facts, attested by Mr. Watts. Let me have a letter to your attorney, Mr. Blade, authorizing him to give me that marriage certificate. You are going into action, and may fall—God forbid it should be so!—but I cannot afford to run any hazards, and must be prepared for the worst. If Meer Jaffier and his party succeed, I shall be handsomely rewarded for my humble services, and shall obtain leave to return to England. For pity's sake give me the power to set myself right there! Cancel the legal obligation that binds me to your wife, and I charge myself with her maintenance and protection from the hour of finding her.'

'My wife!' cried Hay, with a careless laugh; 'what a farce it all seems! My wife! and I know not whether the poor soul be alive or dead. A courtesan, perhaps, dancing at Vauxhall, with a face coated half an inch thick with white-lead, and patches of vermilion under her faded eyes!'

'No, by Heaven, I'll never believe that! Fallen,

alas! poor child, but not impure; no grief would ever drive *her* to depravity.'

'Thou'lt not believe! Alas, poor innocent! and what dost *thou* know of the town's depravity? Have I not seen simplicity as rustic descend to the lowest hell of the dissolute? Woe be to that hand which pushes the frail creature on the first step of sin's fatal slope! If you loved the girl with that brotherly affection you speak of, pray that you may find the rank weeds growing above her in some City graveyard. 'Tis your best chance of finding her no further advanced in vice than when you left her.'

I was inexpressibly shocked by the cruel cynicism and settled conviction of my companion's tone, and yet I could not believe the bitterest fate could have driven Margery to vice. My trust in her better instincts was greater than my belief in Philip Hay's knowledge of the world. These men who study the worst side of mankind can believe anything easier than the possibility of virtue.

'Will you do what I want, Phil?' I asked presently. 'You shall have a share of my good fortune if Colonel Clive dethrones the Nabob.'

'Yes, Robert, I will do this thing for you, and without promise of payment. Though I'll not say

that I shall refuse a ten-pound note should I fall in with you when your purse is full. There are Spartan virtues to which I never have pretended, and the rejection of a friendly loan is one of them. Take me where I can have pen, ink, and paper, and the deed shall be done.'

After this I lost no time in conducting my companion to Mr. Watts's tent, from which my patron was happily absent. Here Philip Hay seated himself on the ground, and on a small travelling portfolio of my providing scrawled a declaration of his marriage with Margery Hawker, when and where performed, with Mr. Everard Lestrangle's name duly set down as witness of the ceremony.

This done, he wrote a letter to Mr. Blade, of Little Britain, authorizing that gentleman to permit the bearer to open a certain sealed case of papers, take from it the document he required, and reseal it with his own seal.

'I trust to your honour for taking nothing but the certificate, Bob,' Mr. Hay said a little doubtfully, as he folded the letter.

'I am not quite a scoundrel, Phil.'

'You are the simplest and best of men,' he replied, with a laugh. 'There is your letter.'

‘And here is Mr. Watts, who will oblige me by attesting your signature to the other paper.’

My patron entered the tent as I spoke, and at once consented to witness the document without any knowledge of its contents.

‘I hope you’ll excuse my black face, sir,’ said Philip. ‘We had rather hot work at the fort to-day, and I had charge of a gun. How these black fellows sweat when they see us reload and fire charge number two before they have recovered from their surprise at charge number one! ’Tis as much as their best gunners can do to fire a heavy piece once in a quarter of an hour, and they think there’s witchcraft in British artillery.’

With this vaunt of our English arms, Philip saluted Mr. Watts, shook me by the hand, and departed, after a whisper to the effect that we should meet elsewhere.

I was heartily glad to have seen him amongst the living, still more glad to hold the two papers he had given me,

CHAPTER XII.

PHILIP HAY MAKES ATONEMENT.

THE rainy season, which by a strange fatality had begun late in the previous year, when an early down-pour might have saved our wretched garrison at Fort William by the stoppage of the Nabob's troops and artillery, in this year of '57 happened to begin somewhat sooner than usual, and on the morning of the 19th of June a tempest of rain descended upon us with such violence as to drive us from under canvas into the town of Cutwah. Here we sought shelter in huts and houses, many of which had been abandoned during the siege, and in one of the more comfortable amongst them Mr. Watts and myself awaited the tide of events. I fully determined that in case of any fighting I would not sit idle under cover to hear English cannon roaring and English soldiers shouting in the distance. I had learnt to carry a gun in my first bitter year of slavery, and

had enjoyed some experience of war with Mr. Holwell at Fort William.

It was on the evening after we abandoned our tents that Colonel Clive paid an unexpected visit to my patron, whom he found lying on a bamboo mat, enjoying the luxury of a repose he could never have tasted at Muxadavad, where the dagger of classic story had ever hung above his head. I rose to leave the apartment when the Colonel entered, but he bade me remain.

‘It is idle ceremony to leave us,’ he said; ‘I know that Watts has confided in you throughout this business, and I presume you are to be trusted.’

‘To the death, sir.’

‘Faith, youngster, you and Mr. Watts have had a narrow squeak for your lives as it is,’ replied our dictator carelessly, and then turning with sudden gravity to my patron he entered upon public affairs.

‘I don’t like the look of things, Watts,’ he began, ‘and I am inclined to suspect Meer Jaffier will turn traitor. Do you know what he has done since you left Muxadavad?’

‘No, indeed, Colonel.’

‘Why, it seems your flight threw the Nabob into such a tremor that instead of firing upon Meer

Jaffier's palace, he sent for him post haste, fell upon his neck with maudlin affection, called him the lamp of wisdom, composer of the state, conqueror of the universe, terror of the world, and I know not what else, after the manner of these Moorish mountebanks, and ended by apologizing with slavish humility for his false suspicions of his beloved servant, who owed every advancement to old Allaverdy, and to whose fidelity the dying Nabob had commended his adopted son.'

'And how did Meer Jaffier escape from so awkward a situation?'

'Awkward, pshaw! These Moors think no situation awkward if lying will help them out of it. Meer Jaffier wept tears of joy upon his royal master's neck, abased himself to the ground to kiss his noble benefactor's foot, and ended by swearing on the Koran to give no help to the English in the contest, provided his beloved ruler allowed him to quit the province unmolested with his family and treasures.'

'He has sworn this?'

'Yes, a native spy of mine was among the Nabob's retinue, and witnessed the touching scene. His messenger has just brought me a description of it.'

‘What revolting treachery!’ cried Mr. Watts.

‘Perhaps it was only diplomacy,’ Clive answered coolly; ‘for Meer Jaffier to reject a reconciliation would have been to show his cards too soon. He may mean us well yet; but we ought not to be in the dark as to his intentions. I have written to him every day since we left Chandernagore to inform him of our movements, but have had no letter from him since a somewhat ambiguous missive on the 19th. Can you find me a messenger to go at once to Muxadavad and ascertain the real state of the case? My fellow is dead beat with the journey, and I cannot send him back to the city without some loss of time. I want a man who can start immediately.’

‘Will you trust me with this commission, sir?’ I asked eagerly.

‘No, the safest messenger would be a native.’

‘I will go as a native. Mr. Watts will tell you I can speak their dialects, and disguise for a swarthy-visaged fellow like me will be easy enough. Pray trust me, sir.’

‘Nay, Robert,’ interposed my patron kindly; ‘you have once escaped out of the lion’s den. Why be so eager to re-enter it?’

‘I want to do something, sir, besides a clerk’s work, though I am pleased to do that in your service.’

‘Egad, he reminds me of my own young days!’ cried the Colonel good-humouredly. ‘I was always wanting to do something. I remember at Pondicherry, in ’48, how, in my haste to get ammunition, I left the battery where I was posted, and ran to fetch it myself, instead of sending a sergeant for it. One good-natured gentleman said it was fear and not zeal made me run so fast. His words reached my ears, and I challenged him, but on our way to the ground the scoundrel struck me. I drew my sword on the spot, and should have fought him there and then, but a crowd of fellows separated us. He was made afterwards to ask my pardon in front of the battalion; but as the court that made him apologize took no notice of the blow, I demanded satisfaction a second time from the slanderer. This he refused; so I waved my cane above his head before our men, and told him he was too paltry a scoundrel for the honour of a drubbing. *That* seemed to have penetrated; for he resigned his commission next day. But this is gossip, and not business.’

. There was some further discussion, in which my

arguments well-nigh prevailed; but finding the Colonel still inclined to doubt me, I watched my opportunity, and presently took advantage of a change in the conversation to slip out of the room, borrow a turban, shirt, and loose trousers from one of our bearers, colour my face and hands with a mixture of turmeric and grease, and thus transformed, went back to the room where the Colonel and Mr. Watts were still conversing, after an interval of little more than a quarter of an hour.

I approached my patron with the usual reverence, and gave him an imaginary message in my best Bengalee, requesting him to go to one of our men, who was seized with sudden illness.

Mr. Watts rose in hasty compliance with this demand upon his charity, and brushed past me on his way to the door.

I burst out laughing.

‘Come, Colonel Clive,’ I cried, ‘you may fairly trust me on your errand since my master does not know me.’

This turned the scale, and in half an hour I was in a little boat, with a couple of native rowers, on my way to Muxadavad. The rain fell in torrents, but I was sheltered under a pitched awning, and

travelled luxuriously in comparison with my wretched transit upon this same river nearly a year ago. Before leaving my quarters I had taken care to deposit Philip Hay's two papers in the safe keeping of my patron.

We reached the city without loss of time, and after loitering in the streets long enough to pick up what news I could, I entered the palace of the commander-in-chief without being asked any questions but such as I could easily answer. I sent our ally a message couched in language so figurative that only he could understand it, and after some little delay was conducted to an inner court, where I found Meer Jaffier alone with his son Meeran, as on the day we witnessed his signature to the treaty. He received me with a somewhat alarming reserve of manner, and had but just begun to question me, when a man whom I knew to be in the confidence of Suraja Doulah was ushered into the apartment with his train of attendants, and received with much polite self-abasement by Jaffier and his son.

This magnate of the court had but just entered when Meeran turned upon me with sudden fury, threatening to cut off my head for a spy, and swearing to annihilate every Englishman in Clive's army

should they dare cross the river into the island. His rage, though happily unreal, was so well simulated as to be alarming, and I was glad when I found myself outside the palace ; but I had scarce got clear of the gates when a kitmutgar overtook me, and bade me hang about the neighbourhood until he should bring me a letter. This order I faithfully obeyed, and lay in a little niche at a corner of the Moorish palace, only partially sheltered from the ceaseless rain, until dark, when the same man who had given me the message brought me a letter, and bade me hasten back with it to Colonel Clive ; whereupon I returned to my faithful rowers, and, the rain now happily abating, had a swift and pleasant journey back to Cutwah.

At Muxadavad I had heard how the Nabob's troops, not foreseeing any chance of plunder in an encounter on the open plain, had set up a sudden claim for their arrears of pay, and refused to stir without a handsome payment on account ; whereby the city had been in a state of riot for the last three days. This I thought was excellent news for our party.

I arrived at Cutwah at an eventful moment. The aspect of affairs was considered most unpromising,

and Colonel Clive himself, in his onerous double capacity of general and statesman, was obviously disheartened. He had received several letters from Meer Jaffier during my absence ; but although these promised fidelity, and appeared to be written in good faith, they gave no definite pledge of co-operation, and the Colonel now began to fear that in the impending struggle the English must stand alone : a sorry prospect, seeing that we were without horse, and had but three thousand men against Suraja Doulah's fifty or, possibly, eighty thousand. In this dilemma the Colonel had written to the Rajah of Burdwan, notoriously disaffected towards the Nabob, entreating him to join us with his cavalry, were they but a thousand. Vain hope ! when was an Indian leader known to range himself upon the weaker side ? A council of war had just been held, and the decisive question mooted : ' Should the army cross the river at once, and at all risks attack the Nabob ; or should they avail themselves of the large stores of rice found at Cutwah to maintain themselves during the rainy season, and in the meantime invite the Morattoes to enter the province and join them ? ' Ballajerow's offer was now known to be genuine. He had a hundred and twenty thousand men ready

to join the English standard. Surely it must be a mad folly to attack Suraja Doulah's great army with a handful of troops, while this gigantic force lay in the mountains awaiting our summons.

Clive was himself the first to vote, and his voice was on the side of caution. The very fact of his voting first was against all martial etiquette, by which the youngest officer present should first have given his opinion. It may be supposed that, by his deviation from rule, the Colonel desired to weigh down the scale on the side of prudence.

I found him alone in a grove of trees near his quarters, lying on the ground in deep meditation. He started to his feet, surprised by my coming.

'I was made for a soldier and not a statesman,' he cried to himself rather than to me; and with an impatient stamp of his foot. 'Good God, how it went against my grain to give that opinion just now! and yet I feel that common prudence demands as much. The game is too desperate. Those black devils would be twenty to one against us. I am sure of my own men; but the Bengalese are poor creatures. 'Tis like throwing a handful into an ocean. And if Suraja Doulah's men should fight—as we know they *can* fight, and have fought under

Allaverdy—Yes, common prudence urges me against so rash a folly. Common prudence! d—n common prudence! she is a jade that never yet led the way to glory. And Coote voted for an immediate attack. By G—, we'll cross the river!

He was not a handsome man; but as he looked up at this moment, with his hand upon his sword-hilt, he seemed inspired. I thought I had never seen a finer countenance.

'Coote,' he muttered, 'and so you want to out-hero me, do you, major? We'll cross the river, *coûte que coûte*.'

He turned upon me sharply. 'What do you want?' he asked in the vilest Bengalee.

I smiled as I delivered my letter.

'From Meer Jaffier, sir.'

'Why, confound your impudence, sir!' cried the Colonel, as he snatched the packet from my hand with more than his usual impetuosity; 'this is the second time you have deceived me. I took you for a beggarly native; and here have you been listening to my rhapsodizing.'

'It is an honour to have overheard a hero communing alone with the goddess Fortune, sir,' I replied, with a smile.

‘Nay, sirrah, you have surprised the reflections of a gamester tempted to stake his all upon a cast. Great heavens, young man, have you any notion of the stake we play for? Upon my soul I doubt it, or you would scarce stand grinning there as if you but watched a game of piquet. If we cross the river to be beaten, the English cause is lost in Bengal, be sure of that. The French, who hate us by nature—yes, sir, they are created with a hatred of Englishmen as surely as with a taste for frogs—have now a political justification for doing us all the evil they can. Is it likely they will forgive Chandernagore? To the French the Nabob inclines, for they have never beaten him. On them he hangs for help, believing them stronger than they are. Bussy has but to march from the Circars to join the tyrant, and we are most inevitably lost. And to lose Bengal is to lose all of India that is of any real value to us. Bombay and the west coast scarce pay their expenses, and our possessions on the coast of Coromandel are a burden; for instead of profit they show a debt of nearly half a million. To fight is to tempt Fate. It is desperate, mad, wicked; for our stake is not only that which we hold at present. We hazard a hundred times more than our paltry certainties of

to-day, sir; we hazard our glorious chances of the future. Yes, to fight is madness.'

He tore open the letter and handed it to me. 'Translate me that, sir, you who are learned in tongues.'

I read the missive—an assurance of fidelity, and a promise that, if possible, the troops of Meer Jaffier should come over to us on the field of battle.

'Yes,' cried Clive, with supreme contempt, 'they will come over to our side when the day is ours. I know these people. If you want to distinguish yourself as a volunteer, Mr. Ainsleigh, you had better make all haste to wash your face and put on Christian raiment. We may be marching in an hour.'

I made the Colonel a military salute, and ran off to obey him. What a fever of the blood, what a pleasant quickening of the pulse, I felt as I hurried to my patron's tent! Robert Ainsleigh, with all his sorrowful memories and bitter sense of loss, melted into air. My individuality was gone; I was a part of England's glory, to triumph or to fall with the fortunes of the day. Hurried and eager as I was, I had no time to wonder at my own high spirits, and to cry aloud in astonishment, 'And this is war! Thrice-divine Mars, be thou henceforward my god!'

Mr. Watts was delighted to see me return in safety; and with that kind patron I shared a comfortable repast before preparing for the threatened march. Having but one suit of clothes with me, and that a civilian's, I borrowed a shabby militia uniform from the captain of the Calcutta corps, and thus attired felt myself a hero.

The trumpet-call roused us before sunrise, and in the first glory of daylight our English host began to cross the river. We started in excellent spirits, leaving the sick and wounded, and a few civilians, Mr. Watts among them, at Cutwah. It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the passage of the troops was completed. We had crossed our Rubicon, the gauntlet of rebellion was flung down, and who could tell which among us would live to repass that fatal tide?

The afternoon brought a new messenger with another letter from Meer Jaffier, a native who had left Muxadavad on the same day as myself, but had taken bye-roads and otherwise lost time, with the unheroic caution common to these people. I was again hastily called upon as interpreter between the Colonel and his confederate. The letter informed us that Suraja Doulah had halted at a village some six miles

south of Cassimbazar, where he intended to intrench and wait the event. Here Jaffier suggested that the English should surprise him, by marching round by the inland part of the island.

Clive listened to this letter with a lowering brow, and then turning to me, cried in his angriest voice,—

‘Bid this fellow tell his master that I shall march to Plassey without an hour’s delay. To-morrow morning will bring us to the village of Daoodpore, and if Meer Jaffier does not join us there, by the beard of his Prophet, or, what is better, an Englishman’s word of honour, I will make peace with Suraja Doulah, and so end this vacillating scoundrel’s chances of the musnud!’

As may be supposed, I took care to modify the language of this message, but made it sufficiently firm to convey the Colonel’s full meaning.

Before sunset we were again on the march, but could make head but slowly, having to wait for the boats, which were towed against the stream, and thus we pursued a most difficult and toilsome journey, advancing fifteen miles in eight hours, and at an hour past midnight arrived at Plassey.

Here we took possession of a mango-grove, and had but just time to look about us, when those near

the Colonel, myself among them, were startled by a faint sound of discordant music in the distance.

‘By G—,’ cried Clive, ‘they are close upon us!’

We kept silence, listening intently to that distant music. It continued, now fainter, now louder, the shrill cry of clarions, the clash of cymbals, the incessant beating of drums—to all of us a most familiar and significant sound, for it had accompanied the night-watches of the Nabob’s army when they lay encamped by the Morattoe ditch at Calcutta.

‘Yes,’ exclaimed the Colonel, after we had stood for some time in silence, ‘they are here before us.’

He said no more, but hastened to give rapid orders for the placing of guards and sentinels. There was a sudden hurrying to and fro, but neither noise nor confusion; and the watch being set, the rest of the troops were bidden to snatch what slumber they could. For the officers and their commander there was of course no sleep on that eventful night.

The grove of Plassey has now become so famous that I need not describe it minutely. It is a space of some eight hundred yards in length and three hundred in breadth, planted with straight rows of mango-trees, and enclosed by a mound, and a ditch choked with weeds and brambles. A little way from

the grove, on the river-bank, there is a hunting-lodge of Suraja Doulah's, surrounded by a garden wall. About a mile from this house the river describes a curve like a horseshoe ; and it was at this point the enemy lay, behind an intrenchment that had been thrown up by Roydoolub some months before for the protection of his camp.

At daybreak we saw the enemy advancing towards the mango-grove where we lay, 50,000 foot, 18,000 horse, and 50 pieces of cannon of the largest calibre, 24- and 32-pounders. Every gun was mounted on a monstrous wooden platform, six feet from the ground, carrying both ammunition and gunners, and drawn by forty or fifty yoke of huge white oxen, while behind each of these monstrous moving stages walked an elephant, trained to push the machine forward with his forehead whenever the ground was unusually heavy. It is impossible to imagine anything more imposing than this barbarous machine, with its train of white oxen ; and I could fancy myself watching some savage Carthaginian host in the heroic centuries before Christ, rather than a modern army.

The tyrant's foot-soldiers were armed with every kind of weapon, matchlocks, pikes, swords, arrows,

rockets. The cavalry were stout fellows from Northern India, mounted on powerful horses. These and the foot-soldiers advanced in separate and compact bodies, and presently fell into position with a regularity and spirit we had scarcely expected of them.

It was my privilege to be in attendance upon Colonel Clive as he stood on the roof of the Nabob's hunting-house surveying this formidable host. He had kept me near his person since I brought him Meer Jaffier's letter, in order that I might be ready to serve him as interpreter at any moment.

'Egad,' he cried, 'I did not think they were so strong! That is a splendid sight, is it not, Mr. Ainsleigh?'

'Splendid indeed, sir. I could fancy myself looking over the sands of Marathon; nor can I believe that the Persians mustered much stronger than these, in spite of Herodotus and his big numbers.'

'Herodotus was a Greek—and a liar, Mr. Ainsleigh. He sprang from the same root as these scoundrels, and we know how these give the reins to their fancy. Why, instead of forty-five millions sterling in the treasury at Muxadavad, I find it is a question if there

are four. See,' he cried, looking through his glass, 'there are Meer Jaffier's troops.'

'Will they join us, do you think, sir?'

'Yes, Mr. Ainsleigh, when the day is ours.'

The issue of events proved this a true prophecy. And now began the business of the day. At eight o'clock a shot from the enemy killed one of our men and gave the signal of battle. Glorious, yet on our side almost bloodless, was the struggle that followed. After a brief skirmish in the open—which cost us too many, though it cost our foe ten of his men to one of ours—the Colonel ordered us back to the grove. Here our little band seated themselves on the ground, and suffered the despot's artillery to waste its fury upon the tops of the mango-trees, while our own gunners answered the enemy's cannon from behind the bank.

At eleven o'clock Clive held a brief council at the drum-head, when it was resolved to maintain the cannonade all day, and sally forth upon the Nabob's camp at midnight.

At noon Providence sent us a sudden storm of rain, which, as we afterwards ascertained, did much damage to the enemy's powder. Their fire now abated; and two hours later we were astounded

beyond measure to perceive the trains of oxen re-yoked, and the whole army retiring slowly towards the camp.

One Sinfray, a French officer, with some forty vagabond fellows of the same nation, retained their station upon a large mound of earth surrounding a tank. This was a most favourable position from whence to assail our retreating foe, and Major Kilpatrick, tempted by the opportunity, advanced from the grove to attack it, with two companies of the battalion and two field-pieces. Before starting he sent a messenger to announce his intention to Colonel Clive, who was found asleep in the hunting-house, and started up with much anger on hearing the Major's message.

He ran to the detachment, reproved Kilpatrick in no measured terms, and sent him back to the grove to fetch the rest of the army. Having thus relieved himself he took the lead of the detachment and proceeded to attack Monsieur Sinfray, who speedily abandoned his ground before so formidable an assailant. And now for the first time we perceived a large body of troops hovering on our right, and these were afterwards discovered to belong to Meer Jaffier, but as they made no signal, they were saluted

at intervals by a sharp fire from our men, which kept them at a respectful distance.

The hottest part of the action now took place between ourselves and Sinfray's forty Frenchmen, while the Nabob's match-lock men powdered upon us from an angle of his camp. The gunners at the same time tried to bring out their cannon, but our field-pieces played so warmly and so well upon them as always to drive them back.

The enemy's horse also suffered considerably at this juncture, and among them fell four or five officers of the highest rank. Their loss flung our foes into obvious disorder; and Clive, taking swift advantage of this, gave orders to storm the angle of the camp, as well as an eminence to which Sinfray and his men, with a number of blacks, had withdrawn after being routed from the tank, and whence they had kept up a galling fire upon us. I was among the party that assaulted this post, and was happily able to hold my own in a hand-to-hand skirmish with a couple of Frenchmen, whom I had the satisfaction of tumbling down the slippery slope on which we wrestled. It was a regular *mêlée*, and as I rolled down the incline grappling hand and foot with these two rascals, I heard Philip Hay on the

height above me roaring out, "King George and victory!" and "D—n to all blacks and frog-eating mounseers!" I kicked myself loose from my Frenchmen, and scrambled up the embankment eager to join my friend; but while the triumphant shout was still on his lips, I heard it change to a shrill scream of pain, as he cried, "Hit, by G—d!"

I was with him in the next moment, holding him in my arms.

'What is it, Phil?'

'My quietus, Bob. No mistake about it this time. So, you see, after all, a rogue may escape Tyburn. Can you lay me down in some corner where I may die quietly? No, lad, there's no hope. I feel myself bleeding inwardly.'

All this was said in laboured whispers, and his ghastly countenance told me but too truly that he was right.

The day was ours: the foe flying right and left of us; the mighty armament of our eastern Nero retreating with a noise as of thunder, the tyrant mounted on the swiftest of his camels, foremost among the flying. Yes, we had beaten them. Mr. Orme protests Suraja Doulah had eighty thousand

soldiers on that fateful field, while Colonel Clive computes them but at fifty thousand. I have adopted the higher figure, but at the lowest our enemies were near fifty to one against us. And they fled, leaving elephants, oxen, forty pieces of cannon, machines, carriages, and baggage of all kinds. It is impossible to imagine a rout more ignominious, a victory more complete.

A couple of soldiers aided me to carry Philip Hay back to the famous mango-grove, now deserted, except by a few bearers and other black servants in charge of our baggage. Clive and the entire army had started in pursuit of the fugitives, and only the disabled remained behind. Sinfray, the French captain, had been wounded and taken prisoner, after a desperate fight, and carried off to one of the tents, where he was attended to by an English surgeon, in common with some of our own wounded.

Philip Hay's strength being but too evidently fast ebbing, we did not wait to reach the tent, but laid him on a bamboo mat under the trees, and here I sat down beside him, while the surgeon was fetched. His hand lay in mine, deadly cold, and his clouding eyes looked up at me with an affection that touched me to the heart.

‘I swear, Bob, thou art the only creature I ever loved : except my mother—except my mother.’

He repeated these words with infinite tenderness, and then lay silent for some moments, staring absently at his fingers as they wandered about the lappels of his coat.

‘Yes, Bob, I loved my mother,’ he murmured presently, ‘though you would scarce believe as much, seeing I have never spoken of her tenderly until this day. She was a poor weak soul. Alas, how often have I called her a fool ! But she loved me, and was proud of my scholarship, though she was but a farmer’s daughter who knew not Latin from Greek, and was sorely put to it to spell plain English. God bless her ! I have a foolish sentimental wish that I could lie by her side under the willows in East Walcott churchyard, instead of by this Indian river. Thou wilt see they bury me like a Christian, Bob ; and if there is anything thou canst claim for me in the way of prize-money, thou’lt send it to my sisters at East Walcott, in Warwickshire. I have sent them a share of most bits of luck that have fallen to me in a life of ups and downs. You see the veriest scoundrel has one soft corner in his heart where he keeps the memories of his childhood, and

the images of those who loved him when he was young and guileless.'

'Dear friend, I will get all I can for your sisters, and see it safe in their hands.'

'Dear friend! God bless thine innocence, Robert Ainsleigh! Dear traitor would be nearer the mark. But Joseph forgave his brothers. Confess now that my treachery made thy fortune. Oh, Bob, 'tis hard to die like this! I was first to mount the bank, and to-day's work would have won me a pair of colours. Egad, how I should have enjoyed plundering the enemy's baggage! You can take all the papers in the tin case; and if you can use those letters against Lestrangle, do so.'

'Oh, Phil, you should die in charity with all men!'

'With all men, yes; but he's a devil. Would you have me die in charity with the devil? Here comes the surgeon. Don't let him put me to any torture, Bob, as you love me. It would be wasted pain.'

The medical officer knelt down and began his examination with much tenderness.

'No,' he said, in answer to Philip's appeal; 'I'll not put you to any pain.'

He seated himself beside the patient with his hand

upon the wrist of the left arm, which now lay listless across the dying man's breast, while his right hand was held in mine. A look from the surgeon told me that all was over.

'A soldier's death,' muttered Philip—'in the hour of victory. God's mercy wipe out my catalogue of sins! Better than Tyburn. Tell—my sisters—died like a soldier—faithful service—of his country.'

And so was severed the one frail link [that bound me to my past life.

CHAPTER XIII.

TREACHERY RECOILS ON THE TRAITOR.

I stood by Philip Hay's grave at midnight on the 23rd-24th of June, the night after the most important victory which English arms have yet achieved in Hindostan. Short is the interval between death and burial in the summer solstice, and my poor companion's funeral rites were a little more hurried than they would have been had he died a natural death in time of peace. We buried him under the mango-trees, in that grove which has now an almost classic renown ; and in default of a parson my own lips read the funeral service above his grave. This done, and a few silent tears shed for a companion whose conduct towards me had been such a strange mixture of affection and faithlessness, I went back to the business of life, which was at this crisis a most feverish excitement.

The army had gone on to Daoodpore.

At daybreak Mr. Watts and Mr. Scrafton arrived from Cutwah, and roused me from a troubled slumber.

‘Dress yourself in your civilian’s costume without loss of a minute,’ cried my patron. ‘I have just received a message from the Colonel, bidding me wait immediately upon Meer Jaffier, to conduct him to Daoodpore. Scrafton is to go with me, and you had better come too.’

I obeyed this summons with delighted eagerness, for I knew that my attendance upon Mr. Watts would most likely introduce me to the side-scenes of the theatre in which this stirring drama of British conquest was being enacted. We went at once to the tent of Meer Jaffier, whose haggard and careworn face denoted a night spent in anxious thought rather than in slumber. He received us with a singular air of reserve; and if we had been doomsmen sent to conduct him to the scaffold, instead of the emissaries of a victorious ally, he could scarcely have betrayed more apprehension. The fact was, that, fully conscious of his own cowardly vacillation up to the very hour of victory, he dreaded some retribution at our hands now that we had raised ourselves to power.

We conducted him with all pomp to the English

camp at Daoodpore, accompanied by his son Meeran, and mounted on his elephant. At the entrance to the camp he alighted from this stately charger, when the guards drew out and saluted him with grounded arms. This compliment the craven evidently took for a movement of threatening import; for he started back, and only recovered himself when Clive ran forward and embraced him, saluting him Nabob of Bengal, Behar, and Orixia.

This meeting was followed by a private conference in the Colonel's tent; after which Meer Jaffier returned to his troops, and hastened with them to Muxadavad, to prevent the escape of Suraja Doulah, or the plunder of the royal treasuries, which the fallen tyrant, knowing matters to be desperate, would doubtless endeavour to empty of all portable wealth.

Colonel Clive did not advance his troops immediately to Muxadavad, eager though they were to enter the royal city. The army marched in the afternoon of the 24th, and halted in the night at a place called Sydabad, about six miles from Daoodpore; while Mr. Watts and myself went on with our attendants to the capital, where we were charged with the delicate duty of inquiring into the state of the treasury, and keeping our eyes generally open to

the aspect of current affairs [in the interests of our honourable masters.

We arrived shortly after midnight, and found the city in extreme confusion. On going at once to Meer Jaffier's palace we heard that Suraja Doulah had fled just two hours before, under circumstances as ignominious as those that attended the flight of that parallel monster who fled from imperial Rome before the prætorian guards of Galba.

Disguised in a menial's dress, and attended only by a couple of venal favourites, male and female, the late sovereign of Bengal, Behar, and Orixá had let himself out of a window, and stolen secretly away, carrying a casket of jewels in his bosom. He did not thus abandon himself to ignominy without some waverings. A midnight council had been held after the battle, and the Lamp of Riches had sought the advice of his servants. Some had bid him throw himself upon the honour of the English; but these he set down as traitors. Others urged that he should encourage the army by great rewards, and appear again at their head in the morning. This he seemed to approve, and ordered an instant distribution of three months' pay to the troops; but the craven wretch had no sooner returned to his seraglio than

panic again seized him, and at daybreak next morning he sent away his women, and fifty elephants laden with their furniture and necessaries, and a considerable portion of his jewels. There is little doubt that he had ere this resolved upon flight, and waited only for nightfall to cover his departure.

The tidings of Meer Jaffier's arrival in the city struck the last blow to this dastard spirit, and at ten o'clock the grandson and grandnephew of that dauntless soldier Allaverdy had crept in secret from the capital where his predecessor had reigned so prosperously.

Next morning beheld the city in supreme confusion. The hapless Lamp of Riches was not permitted to depart to safety. Meer Jaffier, who owed his advancement in life to the favour of Allaverdy, was quick to despatch the pursuers on the track of his dead benefactor's adopted son. Mohun Lall and other low favourites of the fallen despot were seized at noon while trying to escape from the city, where their profligate pleasures and undeserved exaltation had been so vile a scandal. The women and the elephants were stopped next day, some fifteen miles from the capital.

On the 25th, Colonel Clive entered Muxadavad,

attended by a hundred sepoy, and paid a state visit to Meer Jaffier, on which Mr. Watts and I had the honour to accompany him. The inhabitants of the city, who until now had been doubtful to whom they should look as their ruler, perceived by this visit in which quarter the wind lay; and Meer Jaffier, supported by his British allies, now ventured to proclaim himself Nabob. Early next day was held a solemn conference between Meer Jaffier, Roydoolub, and Mr. Watts, attended by me, at the house of those great Gentoo bankers, the Seths. And now was revealed to us the somewhat unpleasant fact that the entire contents of the Nabob's treasury would not suffice for the performance of those splendid promises which we had obtained from our Mahometan ally. The restitution of confiscated fortunes at Calcutta, with the donations to the squadron, army, and committee, amounted to near three millions sterling; a heavy demand upon even a princely treasury.

A period of doubt and some apprehension followed this discovery, and next day a rumour reached us that a midnight council had been held between Roydoolub, Meer Jaffier's son Meeran, and an officer of distinction, in which it had been proposed to

assassinate our colonel. Whether this dark report was true or false I dare not say ; but as it was in no manner inconsistent with the Oriental character, I rode off at once to Mandipoor, where the army had halted on the 25th, and went straight to the commander's tent, where I related the story.

Clive heard me with a smile of contempt.

'Upon my soul, Mr. Ainsleigh, I believe these fellows capable of anything. Now that our arms have won Meer Jaffier a throne, I have no doubt he is inclined to grumble at the price he has to pay for it, and would perhaps consider a bullet through my brain the shortest way to cancel his debt to us. You did wisely in bringing me this news. I was to have entered the city to-morrow, but will now defer my visit for a little, in order to discover whether there is any plot hatching against me. That youth Meeran has a brutal truculent countenance that indicates a natural bent for murder.'

The next day brought us no further hint of the plot, though we had our spies on the watch for any indication of danger ; and on the morning of the 29th our English hero entered the city with an escort five hundred strong, and rode at once to the palace that had been prepared for him, which, with

its gardens, was spacious enough to accommodate all the troops.

Here came Meeran to visit and welcome our conqueror, and immediately conducted him to Suraja Doulah's palace, where Meer Jaffier awaited his ally, surrounded by his officers of state, and with all imaginable pomp and splendour. To assist at such a scene seemed to me like a dream of the 'Arabian Nights,' rather than one of life's realities; and as I stood amongst the little knot of civilians, at a respectful distance from the hero of the day, I could scarce convince myself that I was awake.

The musnud or throne was fixed in the hall of audience, and this seat of power Meer Jaffier avoided with somewhat demonstrative humility until Colonel Clive, perceiving this, conducted him to the spot where it stood, and in a manner installed him in his royal office. This done, he beckoned to me, and bade me speak to the great men in Persian, bidding them rejoice in the downfall of so black a tyrant as Suraja Doulah, and the elevation of so good a prince in his stead. So here stood I, Robert Ainsleigh, the waif and castaway of cruel Fortune, by the side of a throne, interpreting the desires of this modern king-maker, Robert Clive; and I could but think, as

this great English soldier installed the Moorish usurper on the throne our arms had won, it would have been as easy for him to have seated himself there, a new Tamerlane, conqueror and ruler of this Paradise of nations, Bengal,—a wealthy centre from which he might have extended his power wide as the dominions of Aurungzebe.

Sure I am that no such ambitious thought ever flashed across the brain of Robert Clive. From first to last he was a faithful servant of those obscure English traders whom he called his honourable masters. The time came when he told *them* that the hour had arrived in which they might sweep away the shadowy royalties that were supported only by their arms, and reign by themselves alone; but of personal aggrandizement, or the brilliant possibilities of an independent career as ruler of those native forces he so well could wield, I am convinced he never thought. As an apostate to Leadenhall Street, he might have been the Cæsar of this eastern world; as a faithful servant, he was the object of malignity and suspicion to the end of his days.

On the day after this installation of Meer Jaffier another meeting was held at the house of the Seths. Colonel Clive, Jaffier, Meeran, Roydoulub, Mr.

Watts, Mr. Scrafton, and myself were all present ; and with us came Omichund, who had hastened back to the city on hearing of our success, and who hung with fawning affection upon the steps of the Colonel, in whose favour the fond, deluded wretch believed himself firmly established. Arrived at the banker's house, however, he found himself excluded from the carpet where Clive and the rest sat in conference, and perforce withdrew to a distant seat, whence I saw him watch us with eager eyes throughout the council. All went smoothly. The treaties, in English and Persic, were read ; and after some little discussion it was agreed that one-half of the money-stipulations should be paid immediately,—two-thirds of this half in coin, and the remaining third in jewels, plate, and effects, at a valuation,—and that the other half should be discharged in three annual instalments.

This concluded, there remained nothing to do but to undeceive Omichund, whose looks I had observed to grow more restless and eager as the conference proceeded, and whom, despite his falsehood, I could not but pity. Colonel Clive was the first to refer to this matter.

‘ Oh, by the bye, Mr. Ainsleigh,’ he said, looking

suddenly up at me as I stood behind my patron's seat, 'there's Omichund waiting yonder. Doubtless the poor wretch is eager to know his fate. You had best tell him the truth.'

'Oh, sir,' I exclaimed, 'there is no task I would not sooner perform.'

'What, are you so squeamish as that? I thought you had better sense than to compassionate such a scoundrel.—Here, Scrafton, you can tell him.'

Mr. Scrafton bowed, and rose to do the Colonel's bidding, but with no willing air. It was indeed a task which no man could perform without repugnance, however convinced of its necessity. He crossed the spacious chamber, we all following, towards the spot where Omichund was now standing, in an attitude of profoundest humility, yet with eager expectancy gleaming in his sharp black eyes. Alas, poor wretch! he fancied we were coming to congratulate him on the wealth which the treaty assured him.

I am fain to confess that Mr. Scrafton fulfilled his mission somewhat awkwardly. For a few moments he stood silent, looking at the old Gentoo, and but too evidently embarrassed by his obnoxious task. Then with a clumsy abruptness he stammered out, in Hindoostanee,—

‘Omichund, the red paper is a trick. You are to have nothing.’

Never shall I forget the awful effect of these words. For some moments the Gentoo stood transfixed, regarding us with a questioning stare, as if he sought to discover whether this abrupt announcement might not be some foolish joke, planned for the amusement of the English. Then, suddenly convinced by the seriousness of our countenances, he flung his arms above his head with a sharp cry as of mortal agony, and fell back senseless into the arms of his attendants.

‘May I go with him to his house, sir?’ I asked of Mr. Watts, as they carried this martyr of disappointed avarice away to his palanquin.

My patron nodded assent, and I hastened to accompany the dismal procession, for on my poor Tara’s account I was anxious to discover how the old man would bear this bitter blow. He was taken to a luxurious chamber, shaded from the noontide heat, and cooled by blinds which were kept constantly watered. Here he was laid upon a pile of cushions, beside which I sat for several hours; but he remained in a kind of stupor during all that time, and when I left him there were yet no signs of improvement in his state.

Juggernaut Sing, the husband of my Gentoo maid, came to look upon his lord, and, standing by the prostrate figure, pronounced a bitter invective against the English traitors who had thus abused his confidence. I made no attempt to dispute with this wretch, with whom hatred of the English was a sort of monomania, but quietly departed, convinced that I could have no chance of seeing Tara while her tyrant husband was in the way.

It was two days later than this that the tidings of Suraja Doulah's capture reached Muxadavad. The rowers of his boat, failing from fatigue, stopped in the night at Raj Mahal, where the wretched fugitive and his female companion had taken shelter in a deserted garden. Here he was discovered at day-break by a man whom he had ill-treated at this very place more than a year ago, and who ran at once to Meer Jaffier's brother, a resident in the place, to betray his fallen persecutor. The cry of pursuit was instantly raised, the soldiers rushed to seize their victim, and hurried him back to the capital, beguiling the tedium of the journey by the infliction of all imaginable insult and indignity upon their helpless charge. The unlucky wretch survived even this last ignominy, and was brought at midnight to

the palace, where he had so lately played the despot, bound like a common felon, and trembling before the usurper.

I was told that Meer Jaffier seemed somewhat touched by this pitiable sight; and indeed it would have been hard for humanity to behold unmoved a creature so fallen. Suraja Doulah humiliated himself to the dust before his enemy's feet, imploring for life, and life alone; and I think this scene can scarce fail to recall a picture in our own history, when Monmouth, a youth of about the age of this Indian prince, sued to his uncle, James the Second, for the bare privilege of existence. Both James and Meer Jaffier refused the boon that might so safely have been granted; both lived to forfeit the power which their inclement natures had abused.

Whether the usurper was really moved by his helpless kinsman's humiliation, it is hard to say, so skilled in hypocrisy are these people. If he were inclined to melt, there was one at hand who knew not mercy,—Meeran, a youth of seventeen, who urged the instant slaughter of the fallen despot. Meer Jaffier, apparently reluctant to adopt so severe a course, dismissed his late master to a convenient dungeon, and retired to take counsel of his officers.

Some, with a touch of humanity, argued against the murder of so mean a foe, and advised that the late Nabob should be allowed to end his days in the peaceful solitude of a prison; others, more anxious to flatter their new lord than to obey the dictates of compassion, agreed with Meeran that there could be no safety for the state while this wretch breathed. Jaffier wavered between these two opinions, but expressed none himself, too cautious to betray a wish that he would fain see realized without his bidding.

Meeran in this critical situation read his father's mind aright, and with tender solicitude urged him to retire to rest, assured that he, Meeran, would take care of the prisoner. To this Jaffier assented, pretending to be relieved by an assurance conveyed in words of such doubtful meaning. He had no sooner departed than the word was given for slaughter. A gang of ruffians burst into the dungeon where Suraja Doulah tremblingly awaited his doom. In an agony of terror he grovelled at the feet of his doomsmen imploring a brief respite, only sufficient time to say his prayers, to perform his pious ablutions; but a jar of water happening to stand near, one of the assassins flung it rudely over the victim, and

thus gave the death-signal to his colleagues, who instantly set upon their unresisting quarry and hacked him piecemeal.

His mangled remains were paraded through the city next morning upon an elephant. I chanced to meet the dread procession, and never did these eyes look upon a more odious spectacle. It struck terror even to the hearts of an Oriental populace, accustomed as they are to horrors, and an awful silence reigned that day throughout the city of Muxadavad.

Thus violently was extinguished the Lamp of Riches, after having illuminated this world for just twenty years. It was but a brief life in which to illustrate all the vices of man; but I think Allaverdy's favourite had left few species of wickedness unexemplified in his short career.

CHAPTER XIV.

I MAKE A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

AMONGST those who entered Muxadavad with the English troops was our prisoner of war, the French captain, Sinfray, whose wounds proved to be very slight, and who was lodged in a large building near the river used as an hospital for our own sick. Here he was detained a prisoner until Colonel Clive and his counsellors should decide what to do with him. He had small claim upon our kindness except the common claim of a brave soldier, for he and his little band had given us nearly as much trouble as all the rest of the late Nabob's army.

We heard about this time that Mr. Law, with a party of Frenchmen, had advanced from Boglipore in response to Suraja Doulah's summons, but had been stopped on their way by a vague report of our victory at Plassey. Had they pushed on despite the ill news, they might have met and saved Suraja

Doulah ; but while they lingered irresolute, arrived the tidings of the tyrant's capture, on which they marched back to Behar, there to ally themselves with Ramnarain, Vice-Nabob of the province, a Gentoo, and a notorious enemy of Meer Jaffier. Such an alliance, which threatened danger to the new Nabob, must needs be distasteful to us ; and Colonel Clive was by no means disposed to regard Monsieur Sinfray with an indulgent eye.

The man's desperate valour in the defence of one post after another had impressed me, even in that hour of confusion. I had beheld with amazement the almost superhuman activity of his movements, the demoniac fire of his eyes, as they flashed vivid lightnings on his assailants. Strangely had his image haunted me as I saw him standing high above the crowd on the summit of an earthwork, waving a sword above his head, and urging his men with wild cries and frantic oaths.

Some association of the past, some recollection vague as the memory of a dream, had flashed upon me as I saw him thus. Yet what association could this man convey to my mind, what memory of mine could be linked with the image of this stranger ?

The man's face had haunted me even in the luscious

days that succeeded our return to Muxadavad; and I was at once startled and pleased when Mr. Watts entrusted me with a mission that would bring me into immediate contact with the stranger who had thus occupied my thoughts.

Monsieur Sinfray was to be released from the close confinement of the hospital, and he suffered to do what he pleased with himself within the boundaries of the capital, provided he were willing to give his parole against any attempt at escape. I was sent to act as interpreter for Captain Hammerton, one of the officers in Clive's command, who went to announce this favour, and to exact the usual formalities; but whose English prejudices had hindered his acquirement of Monsieur Sinfray's native tongue. We found the Frenchman standing at an open window, gazing out on the broad river and green expanse of rice-fields with a most impatient expression of countenance. He was a man of from forty-five to fifty years of age, tall, slim, muscular, and with a face which indicated a surprising activity of mind.

He turned upon us suddenly as we entered the room, his face lighted with animation, as if relieved by any interruption to the dismal

monotony of his confinement. He invited us, with a careless wave of his hand, to be seated, and then flung himself on a couch opposite to our own. In all his movements I observed a kind of savage grace, which resembled rather the inborn dignity of an Arab chief than the acquired polish of an European gentleman.

‘I am glad to see you,’ he said in French. ‘The solitude and confinement of this place have almost driven me mad. Great Heaven, what a fool and a craven Bussy must be to let you English win so easy a victory, while he dawdles in the Northern Circars! Had Dupleix remained in India, this could never have happened; I congratulate the French Government on the wisdom that recalled him.’

He kissed the tips of his fingers and waved them westward with a contemptuous motion.

‘What the deuce is the frog-eating scoundrel jabbering?’ asked my companion angrily.

I took no notice of Monsieur Sinfray’s rhapsody, but proceeded to explain our mission and my own office as interpreter to his military visitor.

‘Tell him he can say what he has to say in English,’ replied Monsieur Sinfray, still in French. ‘I understand that language, but do not speak it.’

I interpreted this to Captain Hammerton, who seemed to regard the fact as an almost incredible phenomenon. He consented, however, to address the prisoner in his own tongue, and the parole was given and accepted with all due formality on both sides.

This being done, Captain Hammerton was in haste to be gone.

‘Come, Ainsleigh,’ he said, ‘I’ve half a dozen other duties to get through this morning.’

I rose to follow him, with a parting bow to the Frenchman; but as I thus saluted M. Sinfray, I saw him gazing upon me with a fixed amazement that was most startling.

‘Ainsleigh!’ he exclaimed, ‘do you call yourself Ainsleigh?’

‘I have the honour to bear that name,’ I replied, not without a faint blush, for, alas! I knew not whether I had any legal right to it.

‘Oh, come, I say,’ cried the Captain, ‘I must be off. I can’t stay parley-voicing here all day.’

‘Let me not detain your too courteous companion,’ said Monsieur Sinfray; ‘but you, Mr. — Ainsleigh, be good enough to remain with me for a few minutes.’

‘I am in no hurry to be gone, sir,’ I replied ; and I explained his desire to the Captain, who departed, leaving me *tête-à-tête* with M. Sinfray, whose countenance seemed to grow every instant more familiar to me, and about whom there still hung that indefinable association which had attracted and perplexed me even amid the tumult of battle.

‘Ainsleigh ! And your name is Ainsleigh !’ he said, now addressing me in excellent English, though he had but a few minutes before declared himself unable to speak that language. ‘To what branch of the Ainsleighs do you belong ? It is a good old name, and no doubt the family tree has put out many a new bud since I lost count of its blossoming.’

I could not repress a movement of surprise at his English, which was exceptionally good.

‘You speak my language like an Englishman, Monsieur Sinfray,’ I said.

‘That is quite possible,’ he answered, with a smile. ‘I am of no race, and of no nation ; a cosmopolitan, soldier of fortune, citizen of the world, what you will. But you do not answer my question. I had—well, a kind of interest in this Ainsleigh family many years ago. To which of them do you belong ?’

‘My grandfather was a Colonel Ainsleigh, who married Lady Susan Somerton. My father was their only son—Roderick.’

To my utter astonishment Monsieur Sinfray burst into a loud laugh, then crossing the room suddenly, he planted his hands upon my shoulders, and looked me in the face with a more searching gaze than I think I had ever encountered before.

‘Am I mad, or are you a rogue and a liar?’ he cried. ‘Roderick Ainsleigh’s son! Do I hear aright? You call yourself the son of Roderick Ainsleigh?’

‘I have never known any other name, sir.’

‘Great heavens, can this be true? Yes, your face tells me that it is! You are an Ainsleigh!’

‘And you?’ I cried, overwhelmed by a sudden conviction. ‘’Twas *that* I saw in your face yonder, at Plassey, when you stood on the breastwork of the tank fighting as if possessed by a hundred devils;—’twas *that* I saw—the likeness to a picture at Hauteville—the portrait of my father. Oh, sir, you are my kinsman! The word chokes me. I thought myself quite alone in the world.’

I grasped his hand and kissed it passionately. Renegade, adventurer, whatever he might be, it was

with rapture I welcomed him to my affection. This foolish eagerness may well surprise those who boast a long list of blood-relations ; but to me, for whom the word 'kindred' had been no more than an empty sound, the revelation of any family-tie was delightful.

'Heavens, what a fool the boy is !' exclaimed my new-found kinsman, not without a touch of softness. 'And you kiss my hand like a lover, and offer me your honest young heart, and never stop to ask whether I am a scoundrel.'

'I cannot believe you that, sir ; you are of my father's blood. And now pray tell me the tie between us. My father was an only son, but Colonel Ainsleigh may have had brothers of whom I never heard. You must needs descend from one of them.'

'Sdeath, how fast the boy talks ! I have not yet confessed myself an Ainsleigh. My name is Sangfroid, which you ignorant British corrupt into Sinfray ; and I am a captain in the service of his most Christian Majesty Louis the Fifteenth.'

'Nay, sir, whatever name it may have suited your convenience to assume in your adopted country, you are by birth an Ainsleigh. It is written upon your

face. Due allowance made for the difference in ages, you are the image of my father, whom I know only by his portrait at Hauteville.'

'His portrait at Hauteville,' repeated my kinsman, with a wonderful softness of tone. 'Did that still hang in the post of honour when you saw it?'

'Alas! no, sir; it had been thrust out of sight long before I looked upon it. But it seems you know Hauteville?'

'I knew your father. You speak of him with a kind of tenderness. Have you any reason to love him?'

'I have much reason to pity him, sir.'

'Ay, that is truly spoken; for if ever evil Fortune discharged her bitterest storms on one ill-fated head, 'twas that of Roderick Ainsleigh.'

'Yes, sir, his life was a mistaken and unhappy one; his fate most tragic.'

'His fate was tragical, was it?' asked my kinsman, with that eager look of scrutiny so natural to him. 'I do not know the circumstances of his death.'

'He was stabbed in a tavern brawl, sir, while my mother lay on her deathbed. It is the saddest story. The particulars of his murder—for murder it doubt-

less was—were not known till a fortnight after the event.'

'How was he identified?'

'Only by a letter addressed to my mother which was found upon him. He lies in a nameless grave; but my cousin and benefactress, Lady Barbara Lestrangle, erected a small tablet to his memory in the Church of St. Anne, Soho.'

'She did that, did she? Barbara Lestrangle did that? Bless her for that tender humanity! she is a noble soul.'

'There is no purer spirit among the elect in heaven, sir. But, alas! she lives no more on earth.'

'Dead!' he cried, with profound emotion. 'Is Barbara dead?'

'She has been dead some years. You knew her, sir?'

'Yes, I knew and loved her—loved her passionately, truly, foolishly, jealously, unreasonably; was loved by her, and forfeited her love; played fast-and-loose with high fortune; was too proud to try to recover the affection my folly had forfeited; went my own headstrong way and lost her; and so deserved to become the wretch that loss made me. Look you, Robert,—I am not good at mystifications,—your

face is an honest one, and draws me to you. The man who fell in that tavern-brawl was not Roderick Ainsleigh. Your father gave his farewell letter to a low acquaintance, to carry to your mother ; and having done this went to seek his fortune abroad, confiding the poor sick creature in Monk's Alley to Providence, which would do nothing for his pleading, and yet might save so harmless an unfortunate as she. He went, and for nigh a year Fate was against him ; then came a gleam of sunshine. Fortune flung a handful of guineas into his lap, and he went back to the lodging where he had left his wife and child. Both were gone. The mother to the graveyard, the child to a prosperous home, and honourable adoption by the woman he loved best in the world. He himself was thought to be dead. What motive had he to proclaim himself among the living ? His wife was gone beyond his help. His child was in a better home, and amongst more powerful friends than he, who was at best an adventurer, could hope to give him. So Roderick Ainsleigh went back to France, an exile for life, took a strange name, and was lost among the crowd of absentees whom your Hanoverian dynasty had driven thither. Do you understand me now, Robert ?'

I was on my knees at his feet.

‘I do, father!’

He bade me rise, and took me to his breast, in a brief soldier-like embrace.

‘My only son!’ he said. ‘What can I seem to you but the basest of men? Yet even when I went back to France I did not mean to desert you. If ever Fortune had favoured me, I should have reclaimed my own flesh and blood. Fortune never has favoured me, or those on whose side I have fought. I have lived: that is the most I can say for my prosperity.’

‘Oh, sir,’ I cried, ‘to me it is the truest, purest joy to find you! I have been so long alone in the world, the sport of enemies so bitter. Let me not malign Providence: I have found friends and patrons, and have been in some ways favoured by Fortune. But I will tell you my story by-and-by. And now, father, let me ask you one question—it is of all questions nearest my heart. Bitter words have been flung at me—taunts that have stung me to the quick; and though I have ever resented, I could not always gainsay, them. Among the papers Lady Barbara found in Monk’s Alley, there was no certificate of my mother’s marriage. Her stepson, Mr. Lestrangle,

doubtless knew this fact, and has taken advantage of it to call me——'

'Stop!' exclaimed my father. 'If he called you by any foul name, or slandered your dead mother by so much as one reproachful word, he was a liar. You are my legitimate son. When my fortune was at its highest, a chance acquaintance with old parson Lester threw me in the way of his pretty daughter. I was scarce more than a boy, and it was natural to me to pay a kind of court to every pretty woman who fell in my way. Miss Lester was rustic simplicity itself. She took my compliments more seriously than I meant them. Barbara was told of our acquaintance, and resented it; not by open jealousy, which would have brought about an explanation, but by haughty avoidance that galled my soul. Provoked by this, I paraded my admiration of Miss Lester, never meaning, so help me Heaven! that it should go beyond common gallantry. And thus matters went on until my uncle and I quarrelled, and I was banished eternally. 'Twas a year after this, when I had fallen into a state of the direst poverty, and was lying sick in a low London lodging-house, that Miss Lester, having heard by a strange accident of my condition, abandoned her home and

came to succour me. It was a wild and foolish act, doubtless, in the opinion of the worldly-wise ; but if it were so, the angels who descend to comfort fallen man are wild and foolish. For several weeks I hovered betwixt life and death, and my faithful Milly watched my sick-bed. When I was strong enough to crawl out into the sunshine, I took her straight to an old City church, where we were married. Heaven knows what became of the certificate. It never struck me that the document could be of use to any one. But oh ! Robert, how could you believe your father such a scoundrel as to betray the woman who trusted him ?'

'Your enemies and my own persuaded me to think ill of you, sir. Thank God, I wronged you ! You can never comprehend what a burden you have lifted from my soul. And now, sir, command my duty ; I am your son, and obedient humble servant. Tell me what I can do to prove my fidelity. I is hard that we should be fighting on opposite sides.'

'I shall never fight on your side, Robert ; be sure of that ; though I have little feeling for or against your trading companies of either nation. But for George of Hanover my sword shall never be drawn.

I was with Charles Edward Stuart through the campaign of '45; and but for that fatal wavering of spirit which made him yield to evil counsel at Derby, I might now be serving him at his court in London. Fortune favoured my escape after Culloden, where I fought as captain of a company. I was left among the dead upon that fatal field, and woke at daybreak from a state of stupor to find my arm pierced by a bullet, and to crawl as best I might to the nearest shelter, a shepherd's cottage, where I was taken good care of, and whence I departed, a month afterwards, in the guise of a travelling hawker. In this character I got back to France, and here began my military career under Saxe, with such good fortune that I came to India several years ago a corporal, and have since won my captaincy. I am a Jacobite to the core of my heart, Robert; and if ever Fortune favours me here, I shall send her golden fruits to Rome. England has not seen the last of her rightful king, though the white horse of Hanover has ridden rampant over your liberties for the last twelve years. Do not think that the old loyal spirit is extinct there. I have friends at Rome who write me news of England.'

'English news that comes to you through Rome

may scarcely be trustworthy, sir. It is pretty sure to take a Jacobite flavour in that city.'

'What, Robert, are you so determined a Whig?'

'I have scarce any politics, sir. I had my Jacobite fever, and survived it. I think it is a natural disease of youth, like measles. But I do not believe the English nation will ever again welcome an invader, let him come with what pretensions he may. The age of adventure is past, sir, and we are become a trading nation. We have too much to hazard by rebellion. Where idle townsmen and rabble turned out to welcome the Chevalier and his Highlanders, looms are humming and whirling, and cotton-spinning. Be assured, England's loyalty will never endanger her trade interests. We are a nation eager for peace at any price, and value commercial prosperity above the divine right of kings.'

My father heard me with a gloomy countenance.

'You talk like a draper's apprentice, Robert,' he said.

'I belong to a trading company, sir; and I do not believe in the Stuarts. A man who could turn back at Derby was never created to govern a great nation. Imagine Cæsar turning back on the Roman side of the Rubicon, bidding his legions recross the stream,

because some weak-souled counsellor assures him success in Rome is impossible. And you were in the struggle of '45, sir? I am proud to hear that, though I am no Jacobite.'

'Yes, Robert, I came over with Charles Edward, and was through it all: I got a wound, as I told you, at Culloden. That disabled me for months; and I had my share of peril and hardship before I got back to France, which was henceforward in a manner my native country. I fought at Fontenoy, and in many another skirmish, and only came to this country a year ago, after the recall of Dupleix. Sangfroid is a kind of nickname my comrades chose to bestow on me when I was a corporal, and I have stuck to it ever since, for one name is as good as another for a man who has neither kindred nor estate. Yet had you changed your name, Robert, the chances are we should never have known each other. Father and son would have met, and passed on their several ways unconscious, and the voice of Nature would have said nothing.'

'Pardon me, sir; Nature cried very sharply to me when I saw you defending the tank.'

And hereupon I described to him that strange emotion which had seized me in the moment of first

beholding him, and had haunted me ever since, even amid scenes of excitement calculated to extinguish every common feeling. Then followed a long conversation, in which my father opened his heart to me. I showed him Lady Barbara's picture, which he kissed and wept over. I told him my own story, and the motives that urged my return to England; and when the history of the past had been related, I ventured to question him as to the future.

'Are we but to meet and part, sir, like travellers journeying in opposite directions?' I asked.

'Alas! yes, Robert; I must go where duty calls me.'

'And if I can persuade my friends to set you at liberty, you will rejoin M. Law?'

'Yes, Robert, such would be my duty.'

'And if I accept the rank of ensign in the Company's service, which Colonel Clive has promised me—I was but a volunteer at Plassey—we may meet again as enemies.'

'It is the fatal chance of our lives, Robert. But why not remain in your present position, where you are more likely to make a fortune?'

'I have acquired a taste for powder, sir, since Plassey; and—and there is something more honour-

able in military service than in the most trusted capacity a civil servant can occupy. Mr. Everard Lestrangle might refuse to cross swords with a clerk ; but he cannot withhold satisfaction from a junior officer of Clive's. And I am bent on going back to England whenever I can obtain leave.'

'To fight Everard Lestrangle?'

'I think, sir, mine is a case in which it would be worse than cowardice to forego revenge.'

'By Heaven, I believe you are right, Robert ! That Everard Lestrangle is a consummate scoundrel, and I doubt his father is little better. O Barbara, my divinity, my angel, why didst thou throw thyself away upon a cold-blooded, time-serving diplomatist ! And she is dead ! Good God, how often in the darkness of the midnight halt I have conjured her image from the mist of a swamp, or the smoke of a watch-fire, and fancied her radiant, and smiling on me ! And she is dead ! In my farthest wanderings, in my most despondent moments, I have always believed in the coming of a day when she and I would meet, hand to hand and heart to heart, with no cloud of pride or jealousy between us.'

'And you may yet so meet, sir, in a better world.'

'Hush, Robert ! Am I fit for a better world ?'

There came a silence after this, during which my father paced the room with a mournful countenance. It needed no words to tell me his thoughts had gone back to the past.

We had been for some hours together, and I knew not what need Mr. Watts might have had of my services in the interval. I rose softly to depart, and stood looking at my watch, when my father roused himself from that long reverie.

‘You are going to leave me, Robert?’

‘Yes, sir; I am bound to return to my duties. But I will come back in a few hours; and I will do my uttermost to procure your liberty. Yet I wish to Heaven you were in our own service. Do you set much value on your captaincy in the French army?’

‘It is all that forty-seven years of existence have earned for me, Robert; and again I tell you I would not enter the service of your Hanoverian Elector’s brood. I have served my rightful king, and am serving his friend and ally. Yes, his secret ally; in spite of that shameful arrest the other day, which was but a sop to your Hanoverian Cerberus. I am too old to turn my coat.’

‘And have you no thought of returning to England?’

‘For what should I return?’

‘To revisit the old scenes.’

‘To revisit the old scenes! Do you think the sight of them could ever cause anything but bitterness of heart to me? The old scenes! Shall I go there to meet the ghosts of the dead, the phantom of my own youth? I did once revisit Hauteville.’

‘On the night of your uncle’s funeral?’

‘What! was my visit known?’ he asked, surprised.

‘It was suspected; Mr. Grimshaw told me as much.’

‘Tony Grimshaw, a faithful soul who was ever true to my interests! But, Robert, answer me this. When I heard that Barbara Lestrangle had carried you to Hauteville as the child of her adoption, I thought your fortune secured for life; for I knew her to be rich, and generous as the sun itself. How is it she left you unprovided for?’

‘I know not. She died intestate, and all her wealth went to her husband. It is possible that, when I had been safely put out of the way, she was taught to believe me a villain, and for that reason destroyed any will in which she may have provided for me. Again, it is possible that death took her by

surprise, ere she had considered the destination of her wealth ; or she may have left a will, only to be destroyed by the agents of my deadly foe.'

And then I told my father the history of the burglarious attack upon Hauteville, which, happening within twenty-fours of Lady Barbara's death, I had ever considered an inexplicable circumstance, that was likely to involve a deeper mystery than commonly belongs to such deeds.

'The occurrence at such a time was a strange coincidence,' said my father ; 'yet it may have been no more than a coincidence. The matter will be worthy of investigation when you return to England.'

'I mean to investigate it, sir. The possible loss of a fortune would affect me little ; but I would fain fathom the uttermost depth of Everard Lestrangle's iniquity.'

Soon after this I left my new-found father, with a most affectionate leave-taking ; but not till I had obtained his consent to Mr. Watts being admitted to the secret of our relationship. How novel were my feelings as I walked homeward after this strange interview ! A father found, whom I had thought buried in an obscure grave six-and-twenty years ago—found, and to be lost again, perhaps, in a few days ; since

what possibility of frequent communion could there be between two soldiers of fortune in the service of different and unfriendly nations ?

Even this meeting lacked the joy that should have belonged to it. It was sweet enough in the present, but offered no promise of happiness in the future. To such a mere waif and stray as myself, life was but a tangle of broken threads, a story without plot or plan, a labyrinth of petty winding ways that led I knew not whither. For me existence had no fair highway on which I might hope to meet my father again. Nor was his career a more settled one. The reckless spirit of the adventurer was stronger in him than in me ; and he had no sense of loss in his homeless, friendless state. On him the past had lost all hold ; and that rudder of memory by which some men steer their course over life's troubled ocean had by him been cast away, leaving him to drift upon his careless course, the veriest plaything of the wind and waves.

I told my story to Mr. Watts, who was at once surprised and interested by so romantic an occurrence.

' You are quite convinced this Captain Sangfroid is no other than Roderick Ainsleigh,' he asked,

‘and that you have not been made the subject of an imposture?’

‘What motive could there be for imposture, sir? My father desires nothing from me; it was I who volunteered to ask for his liberty. None but my father could be familiar with the events of which this man spoke to-day. Truth has a language of its own, sir, that the veriest blockhead understands. Nor do I depend on words alone; Nature has set her mark upon us. I think, could you but see us together, you would have little doubt of our relationship.’

Upon this my kind patron promised that he would do his utmost to secure the prisoner’s release; a task which would be far from easy, since Clive was much provoked against the late Nabob’s French contingent, who were thought to be fugitives from Chandernagore, by whose hands the English factory at Cassimbazar had been burned and destroyed some short time before.

I went on the same day to make inquiries about Omichund, whom I had left in so piteous a condition. On entering the house he occupied when resident in this city, I was told that he was no better.

Native doctors had been in attendance upon him for some days and nights, and an English surgeon sent by Colonel Clive had also been with him.

I begged to be allowed to see him, and the servants conducted me to a room which I judged to belong to the women's apartments, where I found the unhappy wretch sitting on the floor, with Tara standing over him, her hands clasped, her eyes fixed upon him with mournful solicitude. Juggernaut Sing was absent from the city, or I should assuredly have been refused admittance to this chamber.

The old man's countenance and attitude most perfectly embodied the idea of despair. I think, could David Garrick have seen him at this moment, the picture might have afforded some suggestion even to that great artist, who has perhaps little need to copy reality, having so profound an imagination from which to draw the correct image of every passion. I stood lost in the contemplation of that awful figure—the fixed and death-like countenance, in which the eyes alone seemed yet alive, and these flashed a preternatural fire, an unholy brightness, as of a spirit in hell—the attenuated hands lying open on the carpet, the palms upwards, the fingers slowly closing and opening every moment, as if in the act of

clutching that sordid dross for which this mean soul so hungered.

For some minutes I gazed at him in silence ; then, turning to Tara, I inquired how long he had remained in this condition.

‘ From the hour in which they brought him home, on that miserable day. Ah, saheb, was it well to deceive the old man ? If he claimed too much, you could surely have refused his claim. Was it wise, or brave, or noble, to use him thus ? ’

‘ State policy has cruel necessities, Tara ; your grandfather threatened us. ’

‘ But he would never have fulfilled his threat. His fortunes were bound up with yours. It was but an old man’s foolish anger. ’

‘ And the doctors can do nothing for him ? ’

‘ Nothing, saheb. The mind has gone. Their medicines cannot bring that back. They come and gaze upon him, watch and listen, and then leave us, shaking their heads mournfully. They give him medicines to make him sleep ; but the relief of slumber is not granted to him. His eyes have never closed in sleep since that day. ’

‘ Is he always thus ? ’

‘ With but little change. He has never been his

old self, not for one moment, since they brought him home. He talks sometimes to himself, not to us. His thoughts are always on the same subject.'

My eyes were upon him as she told me this. Though we stood close to him, it was but too evident our voices produced not the faintest impression upon his sense. The bony fingers still continued their unvarying motions, now spreading themselves wide, now clutched convulsively, as if they held the wealth of an empire. Looking upon the old man thus, I was struck by something which I had not before observed, namely, the richness of his dress, which was such as I had never seen him wear before. The costliest embroideries of gold and gems covered his loose robe; his habitual skull-cap of greasy silk was exchanged for a jewelled head-dress which the proudest of India's rajahs might have worn at a royal wedding-feast; and wherever it was possible to place a jewel about the old man's dress, there shone a gem of imperial splendour.

Nothing could have been more ghastly than the contrast between this splendour of apparel and the cadaverous visage of the wearer. Idiocy in its rags and crown of straw may present a deplorable picture; but madness in royal state has a surpassing awfulness not to be described.

‘Why have they decked him out with these gew-gaws?’ I asked of Tara.

‘By his own wish. He insisted upon wearing his richest robes, and would not rest until they were brought to him. We are but too glad to humour every whim, in the hope of improving his condition.’

‘He must have some fancy in connection with these robes,’ I said.

‘Yes,’ answered the girl, with a reproachful gaze; ‘he fancies that the English have kept their promises to him. You will hear him say so presently, doubtless, for it is of that alone he talks. He believes himself rich, and wears these garments as a token of his state.’

‘And he *is* rich, Tara; he must be a wealthy man without the exorbitant price which he would fain have exacted from the English for a fidelity which we had a right to expect without payment. Your grandfather is still a rich man. He has obtained restitution of his losses at Calcutta, he has obtained the payment of moneys lent by him to the Rajah of Purneah, and I know not what hoards he may not have besides. Why, those very jewels with which he has decked himself are worth a fortune. Are the English to blame because his greed of gain is insatiable?’

‘They are to blame for having deluded him with a false promise. They are to blame for *this*.’

She pointed at him with an expressive gesture, as if she would have said, ‘O England, behold this wreck of humanity! It is your work.’

At this moment the old man’s eyes rolled slowly towards me, and for the first time since I had entered the room he seemed conscious of my presence.

‘Yes,’ he said, nodding at me with an idiotic smile; ‘the English are a just people. They keep faith—they keep faith! Omichund trusted them, and he has his reward. A whisper, a look from him might have ruined all; for the Nabob’s suspicions never slept. A look from Omichund might have been ruin and death to the English. But he was true; and they—they have been true!’

After this came a pause, during which he looked downward at a necklace of pearls and uncut emeralds that hung upon his breast.

‘These robes and jewels are not rich enough for a man of my wealth,’ he said; ‘they are paltry. Let me have embroidery of gold and diamonds only, rich as the Mogul wore when Delhi was great. What, you do not know how rich I am! You cannot guess

the reward these English have given me. Crores of rupees! 'Twas written in the sealed treaty. "I swear by God, and the Prophet of God!" so runs the Persian oath. I say it was in the treaty. I made them promise that, lest by some chance I should be cheated at the last. It was written on red paper the colour of the English blood that would have been shed if the old Gentoo had turned traitor. Blood! I could have flooded the streets of Muxadavad with blood, had I betrayed the English and their ally, Meer Jaffier!'

Thus he rambled on at intervals as long as I remained with him, always harping on his wealth and the good faith of the English. I need scarce say that every word gave me the keenest pain; for whatever justification there may have been for the act that had overthrown Omichund's reason, this melancholy result was none the less to be deplored. Strange, that the massacre of his household should leave his intellect unimpaired, and the disappointment of his avarice reduce him to idiocy! He was indeed a creature in whom the love of gold had ever been a passion but one step removed from madness.

CHAPTER XV.

I ACQUIRE CERTAINTY.

I HAD the happiness to win my father's release from Colonel Clive through the intercession of my ever-kind friend Mr. Watts ; and this favour was but the signal for our parting, with only the vaguest hope of meeting again, when or where we dared not speculate.

I think my father's heart yearned towards me in those few days of frequent intercourse which we enjoyed at Muxadavad, and that it grieved him to bid me farewell.

‘ You will go back to England, Robert, and I to France, whenever my regiment returns thither, always supposing I live to accompany it. I will give you an address in the city of Paris whence a letter is sure to reach me sooner or later, if I am above ground ; and you must tell me where I can write to you in London. Stay ; under cover to Mr. Swinfen. That will be a safe address, will it not ? ’

‘The best in the world, sir; and, indeed, I think the only one I could give you. And now tell me, sir,—I am a young man, and you yourself in the prime of life; Fortune may yet favour one or both of us;—if I can ever make a home in England, will you come and share it?’

‘A home, Robert! What does that mean? ’Tis a word I never could understand. A roving devil entered me when I was a boy, and has tugged at my heartstrings ever since, dragging me now here, now there, by land and sea. I once shared a garret with thy mother, poor devoted soul; and if I could have got bread for her and thee, should not have deserted it. Since then I have been a wanderer, with a past so sad, I dare not look back upon it, and with a blank for my future. Nay, Robert, do not look so sadly at me. If I live to be a battered old graybeard, and thou wilt give me a corner at thy hearth, I will come and smoke my pipe there, and tell stories of Lauffeld and Bergen-op-Zoom, St. Thomé and Gingee, and dandle thy little ones on my feeble old knees. But that is a long way to look forward. In the meantime be sure that I love thee.’

And so we parted. One gift I was able to offer

my father as a memento of this strange meeting, and I doubt if all Omichund's jewels would have seemed to him a treasure so precious. I had contrived, since our first encounter, to get Lady Barbara's miniature copied on ivory by a Hindoo. The colours were somewhat too vivid, and the stippling, though performed with an amazing neatness, lacked the softness of Miss Kauffman or Coe-way; but poor as the art was, the likeness was a fair one, and the gift was received with rapture.

There now came a kind of lull in the affairs of this province, though the horizon was by no means cloudless. In the first expansive impulse of gratitude, or perchance with the hope that by rewarding the chief he might escape some part of his engagements to the subordinates, Meer Jaffier presented Colonel Clive with a sum of money that I have heard computed at one hundred and eighty thousand pounds. This gift our hero took without scruple, but refused presents of a yet larger amount from the Seats, and other wealthy inhabitants of the capital. Nay, had he been of the unscrupulous nature which his enemies loved to depict him, there are no limits to the wealth he might have acquired, or to the power he might have seized. When he was afterwards called upon to

defend his acceptance of Meer Jaffier's bounty, he did it with a boldness that gave evidence of a clear conscience, and with a logic that none could dispute.

In Calcutta, where of late had prevailed discontent and anxiety, there now arose a spirit of universal rejoicing. Fortunes that had been thought annihilated were now restored, and the sunshine of prosperity illumined a city where Desolation had long held her gloomy reign. I think, at this juncture, while the money won from Meer Jaffier's reluctance, by him alone, was pouring into the Company's treasury, the people whom Robert Clive had redeemed from despair entertained some faint sense of gratitude for his services. Yet even at this early stage the spirit of dissension had arisen. The distribution of the donations to the army and navy was not made without a display of ill-feeling on the part of the recipients, and a small body of military officers protested against an equal division of the Nabob's bounty with the officers and sailors of the squadron which had accompanied the army to Plassey. These malcontents Clive was compelled to remind, with that undaunted frankness which was natural to him, that a sum of money obtained from the Nabob solely by his negotiation

was not a matter of right, or property to be disposed of by their vote.

‘So very far from that,’ wrote the Colonel in a letter, of which a copy was forwarded by him to Mr. Watts, ‘it is now in my power to return to the Nabob the money already advanced, and leave it to his option whether he will perform his promise or not. You have stormed no town and found the money there ; neither did you find it in the plains of Plassey after the defeat of the Nabob. In short, gentlemen, it pains me to remind you that what you are to receive is entirely owing to the care I took of your interest.’

He then went on to declare that he would consent to no injustice towards the navy, and begged to retract his promise of negotiating the payment of the Nabob’s bounty.

This speedily brought these discontented gentlemen to the dust, and they were as cordially forgiven as they had been sharply reprimanded.

And now occurred an event which shed a gloom over our victory, in the sudden death of that brave and honourable seaman Admiral Watson, who perished of a putrid fever on the 3rd of August, and within six weeks of our victory at Plassey.

It was shortly after this calamity that the dearest

wish of my soul was fulfilled, and I found myself free to return to England. My humble services, and the real dangers which I had endured at Muxadavad, were deemed by Mr. Watts and the committee worthy of a reward I should never have dreamed of; and my patron surprised me one morning by the gift of bills for three thousand pounds.

‘It was the Colonel’s doing, Robert,’ said Mr. Watts, when I expressed my surprise at this bounty; ‘he said you deserved as much as that for your spirited journey to Meer Jaffier’s palace, and as much more for having been through the fire with me, to say nothing of your service as a volunteer at Plassey. There were some black looks among our friends of the select committee when he said this, as you may guess, and they were for giving you six months’ extra pay as a sufficient reward for having lived for several months in daily peril of impalement or decapitation. Upon this the Colonel swore that you should have the money, even if it must needs come out of his own purse. “And it is not the first time I have stood between you and a meanness, gentlemen,” he added, in his grandest manner. Of course this brought them to their senses; for though I daresay they would have had no objection to the

Colonel's rewarding you from his own pocket, they have a great terror of offending him. So the item was passed with a smothered groan : " Three thousand pounds sterling to Mr. Robert Ainsleigh, clerk and interpreter." "

' I know not how to thank the Colonel, or you, sir.'

' Nay, Robert, 'tis no more than you deserve ; for you have been vastly useful. But this money is not to be your sole reward. In acknowledgment of your services at Plassey, the Colonel intends giving you the rank of ensign, with two years' leave of absence. I told him you were very eager to obtain military rank.'

' Oh, sir,' I cried, fairly overcome by such thoughtful kindness, ' this is too much ! ' I could say no more ; this shower of gifts almost bewildered me. I was free to return to England, an ensign in the Honourable East India Company's service ; a rank that was modest enough, but one to which Everard Lestrangle could not deny the right of a gentleman. I was in a position to prove my legitimacy, to annul my hateful marriage ; and I held in my hands the nucleus of a decent fortune. What more could I have asked ? What more !—if Dora had still been free. But, alas ! she was lost to me for ever, since,

should any encounter between her husband and myself prove fatal to him, she was of a nature too noble to permit her acceptance of a hand stained with his blood, however fairly he might come by his death, however dearly she might love his slayer.

‘How dare I think of her as still loving me?’ I asked myself angrily. ‘Because life has stood still for me since the hour in which I was severed from her, am I so weak a fool as to suppose time has made no change in her? Nor are our positions in any manner identical, for while I have guarded her image pure and stainless, she has been taught to think of me as a liar and a villain, unworthy of so much as one thought of hers.’

I told myself this, and yet I longed with no less eagerness to return to Europe, to look once more upon the face that had been with me in so many an exile’s dream of home. When I reached England, I might hear of Mrs. Lestrangle abroad, at St. Petersburg, at Hanover, at Venice—wherever the diplomatic service might take her husband; but in whatever country she might be, if she still lived upon this earth, I was determined to see her, to prove to her that I had never been the false wretch my enemies had taught her to think me.

If she still lived! Chilling as a sudden blast from the frozen pole came the thought that she might be dead. From mortality's common foe neither youth nor beauty would exempt her; and there was never an English newspaper came to me that did not contain the tidings of some unexpected doom—a husband swept off in the prime of manhood by a fever, a family extinguished by malignant sore-throat. Death was ever busy among the homes of the great, and medical science seemed powerless to cope with the destroyer. *Her* name I had never seen among the ranks of the dead; but many events may escape the knowledge of an exile who thinks himself fortunate if he sees a newspaper or a London magazine once in six months.

I sailed for England in the *Prince Edward*, a noble vessel, which performed the voyage in less than seven months. Yet even this transit, rapid as it was compared with the progress of the *Hecate*, seemed slow to my impatience. No longer was I cooped in a Pandemonium between decks; I now enjoyed all the luxuries permitted to the sea-voyager; but I should have been inhuman had I not sometimes visited the lower deck, on which numerous disabled soldiers were being conveyed back to Eng-

land. With these poor wretches I spent some time daily, and was enabled to obtain certain small indulgences for them from the skipper, a very superior person to the brute with whom it had been my ill-luck to sail on board the *Hecate*.

It was bleak March weather when I landed at Portsmouth ; but no words can describe the rapture with which I inhaled the chill wind of my native country, and gazed on the mean housetops and steeples of the little naval town, with all its common sights and sounds. The dingy inn where I put up for the night seemed a palace, and I was delighted with the novel sensation of being somewhat uncereimoniously served by one free-and-easy waiter, instead of the stately crowd of slavish Oriental servants, who attended the dinner-table of Mr. Watts and myself as if it had been a banquet of the gods. I cannot, however, go so far as to say that the steak which composed my dinner seemed to me a happy exchange for the pilaus and curries, the various fish, fruits, and vegetables of Hindostan ; but I was in no humour to be critical as to what I ate, being in a fever of impatience that deprived me of all appetite.

I started for London at daybreak next morning, on

the top of a stage-coach drawn by six horses, which seemed to me a thing of supernatural speed after the wearisome slowness of a palanquin; but even by this rapid mode of travelling I did not reach the city till the dead of night, and was fain to await the advent of morning at an inn in the Borough, where I was put into a room looking out on a covered gallery, much like that where I had lain on my first coming to London. Nor did I sleep more soundly than on that never-to-be-forgotten night; now, as then, I came friendless to a strange city, and though I carried a small fortune in my pocket, I think I would have gladly bartered my three thousand pounds for the certainty that a single friend would welcome my return.

I breakfasted as early as London habits would allow, and found myself in the streets at an hour when the city had still a half-awakened look, shutters scarcely unclosed, and stout country wenches bawling, 'Milk, maids below!' at every area. On London Bridge I found workmen busy taking down the ruinous old houses which here impeded the thoroughfare, narrowing the roadway to but twenty feet, and in some places only twelve feet. I was not sorry to see this reformation; for though the effect of these old many-gabled houses

overhanging the river, like a street suspended by some magical enchantment betwixt sky and water, was very pleasing to the lover of the picturesque, the narrow space afforded for all kinds of traffic was a most serious nuisance, and the cause of many accidents. This improvement, which I thus saw in its commencement, progressed with the slowness common to public works, and was not completed till 1760, in which year His Majesty George the Third, our present gracious King, began to reign over us.

On the Middlesex side of the bridge I took a hackney-coach, and bade the man drive me to St. James's Square, for I considered that at Sir Marcus Lestrangle's residence I should most easily obtain tidings of her I came to seek. The Indian sun, to which I had exposed myself somewhat recklessly, and seven years of absence, had so much altered me, that I hardly feared recognition, whomsoever I might meet.

I found the house in St. James's Square, with but one unshrouded window, just opening itself to the March sunshine, like a fashionable belle who lifts one languid eyelid when all the working world has been long astir.

I alighted and knocked boldly, determined to run

all hazards rather than remain unsatisfied. The same gigantic porter who had answered my questions seven years before appeared in response to my summons, as little changed in face, figure, dress, or bearing, as if he had been some servitor of fairy legend, and had spent the interval in an enchanted sleep.

I had suffered and seen so much in my absence that I was unreasonably surprised by the unchanged appearance of this man. Seven years! Great Heaven! Did I judge by my own feelings, I should estimate the period a century. Seven years, and my noble benefactress, whom I had left in the pride of womanhood and beauty, was mouldering in her grave! Seven years, and I returned to find myself doubtless despised and forgotten by the only woman I had ever loved!

I asked the porter if Sir Marcus Lestrangle were in London. He shook his head, and regarded me with a wondering stare.

'Sir *Everard* Lestrangle and his lady will be in town to-morrow, sir,' he said; 'they are on a visit in Surrey.'

'Sir *Everard* Lestrangle! Is Sir Marcus dead?' I asked.

‘Sir Marcus Lestrangle has been dead nearly two years, sir. This house now belongs to his only son Sir Everard, and his lady.’

‘Miss Hemsley that was?’ I asked; for the sense of a great lapse of time again seized upon me, and it seemed but too possible that Dora might be dead, and some second wife installed in her place.

‘Miss Hemsley that was,’ replied the porter solemnly, and then asked if I would leave my name.

‘No,’ I said, ‘the name is of no consequence. I will wait upon Sir Everard in a day or two—here or elsewhere. He frequents some club, I suppose?’

‘Yes, sir; my master is to be seen at White’s, in St. James’s Street, *by his friends*, who are mostly members of the club.’

There was a covert insolence in this which I fully understood. The porter would have me to know that his master was not accessible to any copper-visaged stranger who might seek an interview with him.

‘Lady Lestrangle is well?’ I asked; and to soften this pompous Cerberus I here slipped a guinea into his ready hand.

‘Yes, sir, my lady is vastly well,’ he replied with friendly eagerness. ‘Would your honour step in

and rest a bit, while I answer any inquiries you may please to make about the family? Your honour has lately returned from foreign parts, I think?’

‘Yes, from—’ I hesitated a moment as I was about to pronounce the word ‘India:’ that one word, repeated to Sir Everard, might have betrayed my identity, and I wanted to spend some little time in England before he knew of my return—‘from Spain.’

‘Dearey me! The late Sir Marcus and his lady spent many years in Spain. Would your honour please to sit?’

I had entered the hall, a lofty apartment paved with gray marble, and distinguished by a dismal splendour. Never till this moment had I penetrated even so far into this house, and I looked around me curiously. ’Twas here she lived; I fancied her slight figure fitting up and down the broad staircase, her little hand lightly resting on the grim bronze balustrade.

‘Yes, sir,’ said the porter, completely mollified by my donation; ‘my lady is well, or as well as a lady of quality can be, that is out at theatres and routs, and Vauxhall and Ranelagh, and such-like, every night of her life, and at sales of pictur’s and cur’osities almost every day.’

‘What! she leads a life of pleasure—she loves the amusements of the town?’ I said, with an unreasonable sense of bitterness. Because my life had been one long mourning, did I think she too must needs be desolate?

‘Yes, sir; my lady is obleeged to do as other ladies of her station, and Sir Everard likes to see her happy.’

‘Happy!’ I exclaimed involuntarily; ‘and that is called happiness!’

The porter scrutinized me sharply.

‘You are some relative of my lady’s, perhaps, sir?’ he asked.

‘No; but I come from one who is much interested in her welfare. I hope to see her soon after her return to town; yet I would rather you did not mention my visit either to Sir Everard or my lady;’ and to give emphasis to this hint I slipped a supplementary crown into the man’s hand.

‘I shall not say a word, sir,’ he replied, as he ushered me to the door.

She was well, she was happy, her life a round of fashionable dissipation, and she had forgotten me. This seemed to me the sum of what I had heard; and although in my fondest dream I could scarce

have hoped to find myself remembered or regretted, it was nevertheless a pain to me to hear of her gaiety.

‘Fool!’ I exclaimed within myself, ‘what other fate couldst thou expect? Her love for thee was but a girlish fancy, born of her distaste for thy rival; and thou gone, and the rival thrust upon her, she has reconciled herself to her fate, and takes life gaily, like other women of quality.’

Thus did I argue with myself; yet so crestfallen was I, that, on the simple strength of this porter’s intelligence, I had half a mind to go back to India by the next ship that would carry me thither. Better to be facing Meer Jaffier’s foes on the borders of Behar than to suffer these pangs of jealous anguish in a country where I had not one single friend. With the strange perversity of human nature, I, who had so languished to return to England, now felt that my coming had been but a folly. It seemed that I had scarce a purpose in this great city, to which I had hastened with such burning impatience.

The invalidation of my marriage? Yes, that was a task to perform; but of what avail the undoing of those rites when she whom alone I loved was the happy wife of another? What else had I expected to

find her? Had I hoped to discover her a widow waiting for my return? Alas! I knew not what I hoped; I knew only that I had found disappointment.

I carried Philip Hay's letter and statement in a pocket-book that I wore always about me; and provided with this I returned to the City and sought out Mr. Blade's office in Little Britain. I found this office a darksome den in a somewhat dingy locality, and Mr. Blade himself struck me as a kind of practitioner better versed in the exercise of legal chicanery than in the nobler offices of the law; a man who would take to a doubtful case with a natural relish, and be more at his ease in the darkest labyrinth of fraud than in the broad highway of honesty.

This gentleman received me with amazing civility, and seemed really moved when I told him of Philip Hay's fate.

'That man's disappearance has always been a puzzle to me, sir,' he said; 'and I much regretted his loss as client, companion, and friend. In the first capacity he was of little profit to me directly, for I believe he never paid a debt in his life; but I am bound to confess that he put me in the way of two or three very good things with his young patron,

Lord Mallandaine. There was an affair on Heunslow Heath, sir, an assault and abduction, which might have resulted in a most prodigious scandal, implicating more than one member of the peerage, if a man had not been found, sir—Jumping Joseph, a young man very well known upon the road—who was tried and hung, sir, for that very affair; and, I think I may venture to say, by my agency alone.’

‘What!’ I exclaimed, aghast at this horrid avowal; ‘an innocent man was executed for a crime of Lord Mallandaine’s! and you are proud of the transaction?’

‘An innocent man! No, my dear sir, Jumping Joseph had earned a halter a dozen times over; but it was not he who ran away with pretty Miss Lockson of Holford Hall, Wiltshire, and left her father for dead in his own travelling-carriage, though a train of circumstantial evidence, which I had the honour to prepare, brought it home to him in the most convincing manner. The hemp was grown, and the yarn was spun, my dear sir; it was only a question who should put the rope round his neck.’

‘And my Lord Mallandaine’s victim, this Miss Lockson?’

Mr. Blade shrugged his shoulders.

‘I cannot say for certain what became of the girl,’ he said. ‘’Twas murmured in her father’s neighbourhood that she wandered home one day about a year after the abduction, somewhat touched in the head, and would never speak the name of her betrayer. But your country folks have a knack of inventing these romantic stories. The history of Lord Mallandaine’s victims would fill a big book.’

‘Does the wretch still live?’ I asked.

‘Live? yes; and is counted of some importance in his party. ’Twas but the other night he stood up in the House of Lords to denounce the reputed author of an immoral poem, with whom he was not long ago on terms of warm friendship.—But I ramble, sir; so to business.’

I gave him Philip Hay’s letter, which he at once acknowledged as genuine, but was not so prompt to hand me the box containing the papers.

‘There is one circumstance our lamented friend appears to have forgotten,’ he said, with a smothered sigh.

‘And pray what is that?’

‘The fact that he left these herein-named papers with me as a—ahem!—a kind of security for my claim against him.’

‘I have no knowledge of that, Mr. Blade, nor, I dare venture to say, had Mr. Hay any notion you would advance such a claim. He spoke of you as a friend rather than as a lawyer.’

‘I am flattered by the friendship of a man who possessed all the elements of greatness,’ replied Mr. Blade; ‘but, as the father of a family, I am bound to remember my claim against our lamented friend, which includes costs out of pocket.’

‘But you are also bound to remember that these papers are of no intrinsic value——’

‘They are of value to you, my dear sir,’ interposed the lawyer, with a wily grin, ‘or you would scarce take the trouble to come after them.’

This was an unanswerable argument; so I replied to my gentleman with more candour than such a knave deserved at my hands.

‘I have reason to believe there is one document in that box of importance to myself,’ I said; ‘but I am very sure there is no paper in it of the smallest intrinsic value.’

‘Intrinsic value is one thing, sir, and personal value another. I never supposed that my lamented friend had left bank-notes or India stock in my keeping. But there is no commodity of such fluc-

tuating value as private papers. I have seen a gentleman's note of hand, and a lady's love-letter, sold at a price that would astound you.'

'No evidence of a fine gentleman's iniquity or a fine lady's folly would astonish me, sir. But to return to Mr. Hay's papers.'

'To return to those papers, sir. You will perceive, in the first place, that I have an equitable lien upon them in the shape of my bill of costs; and in the second place, had I no such lien, I should not be authorized in handing them to you on the strength of that letter.'

'What can be plainer than this letter, Mr. Blade?'

'Nothing, if the writer were still alive, and the property his to dispose of. But the writer's life having lapsed in the interim, the papers in question belong to his next of kin, who, on taking out letters of administration, would be able to claim these with the other effects of the deceased.'

'Good heavens, sir, what do you mean by letters of administration? You must be aware that Philip Hay lived and died a pauper.'

'I am aware of nothing relative to the last six years of his life, sir; and in the eye of the law he

has an estate which must be administered according to the law in such cases made and provided. And I, sir, as a gentleman and an attorney, would be guilty of a gross misdemeanour—nay, indeed a fraud upon Mr. Hay's heirs, executors, and assigns—should I hand you the aforesaid papers on the strength of that letter.'

This was beyond measure provoking, and I was sorely tempted to lose patience with Mr. Blade.

'Come, come, sir,' I said; 'I doubt there is some little mistake here. My bronzed face deceives you, and you fancy because I have come from the Indies I must needs be a greenhorn in all matters of business. Allow me to tell you that I was a civil servant of the Company, and that my duties brought me in hourly contact with the natives of Hindostan, who are the veriest rogues and knaves that live upon this earth. A man who has dealt for six years with them, sir, has little to learn in chicanery, and will scarce submit to be defrauded of his honest rights by a knavish perversion of justice.'

'You are impertinent, sir,' replied Mr. Blade, with an air of dignity, 'and since you choose to advance your claim in an offensive manner, I shall stick to the letter of the law, and hereby refuse to surrender that

box to any one but the lawful administrator of the late Mr. Philip Hay's effects.'

There was a resolution about the scoundrel's tone that told me he was only to be countered by equal resolution on my part. Should I show any desire to conciliate him, or to bargain with him, he would suppose the paper to be of vital importance to me, and would do his utmost to bleed me of my last guinea.

'Very well, sir,' I said, rising and putting on my hat; 'in that case there is no more to be done. If the letter of the law will not give me the paper my friend desired me to have, I must e'en do without it. I have too much respect for the law to tempt you to a breach of it. Good-morning.'

Mr. Blade stared at me for a moment dumfounded; but as I moved towards the door, he skipped suddenly forward and placed himself before it.

'Not so hastily, sir!' he exclaimed; 'you had best, at any rate, leave me your name and address. In this letter you are but spoken of as the bearer. If I find I can strain the law in your favour, I——'

'I would not have you burden your conscience to do me a service, sir. My name and address are of no importance. Be so good as to move away from

that door ; I have engagements elsewhere, and am somewhat hurried.'

'Sir,' cried Mr. Blade in an appealing tone, 'between men of business this is childish. You want a paper from that box, or you would not have come to Little Britain. What will you give for that paper?'

'I decline to treat with you on the subject, sir. If my friend's desire gives me no sufficient claim to the paper, I will have none of it.'

'Sir, this is mere histrionic display. You want the paper. Give me Bank-of-England notes for one hundred pounds, and it is yours.'

'I will not higggle for it, sir.'

'Come, come, sir; say fifty. 'Tis not half my bill of costs.'

'I have no money about me, sir, and can very well exist without the paper;' and I made another move towards the door.

'Bring me five-and-twenty guineas, sir, and it is yours. 'Twill barely cover my costs out of pocket; but the father of a family is the plaything of Fortune;' and at this juncture Mr. Blade brushed away an imaginary tear with his dingy ruffle. 'I blush to sink so low, sir, but as the father of a family I will take five-and-twenty guineas. In the words of Shak-

speare's Apothecary, "My poverty,"—but no, sir, I will not trouble you with a hackneyed quotation. If you would let me have the money before two o'clock this afternoon, I should take it kindly.'

'You shall have it, Mr. Blade. I do not much affect this kind of barter; but as I have trespassed on your time, I shall be happy to make you some recompense, and will bring you the money you demand at two o'clock.'

'Sir, God bless you! I despise my weakness in thus allowing the feelings of a father to vanquish at once the principles and instincts of a legal practitioner; but the times are bad; there is positively nothing doing, sir, nothing.'

I left Mr. Blade, and hastened to deposit the bulk of the bills Mr. Watts had given me with a banker, to whom the same kind friend had recommended me. A couple of hundred pounds I kept in hand; and as I thought it but likely there might be something outlandish in my appearance, and as I had no desire to be remarkable, I went at once to a respectable tailor in the City, and bade him measure me for a suit of clothes in the plainest modern style. He would fain have persuaded me to choose some gaudy hue, such as that bloom colour which my dear friend

Goldsmith afterwards made so famous; but I selected a cloth of a dark sober green, which, when he saw me resolute to have it, Mr. Snip declared was the genteelest thing in his shop. But even after this I had some difficulty in leaving him without giving an order for a scarlet shag frock, without which he declared no gentleman's wardrobe could be complete. This done, I was fairly puzzled when the man asked me where he should send the goods, and could give him no better address than the inn where I had put up. From the tailor's I went to a barber, who dressed and powdered my hair after the prevailing fashion, and tried hard to persuade me to buy a wig, recommending me one entirely of human hair, and in a style which he called Jehu's Jemmy, for it seems that fine gentlemen had of late been seized with a passion for resembling their coachmen. After this he showed me a scratch, which he called the genuine Blood's skull-covering. But finding me unmoved by the exhibition of these, he produced one of a monstrous size and feathery appearance, which he told me was known amongst men about town as the Apothecary's Bush. This last he pressed upon me as the *ne plus ultra* in taste. The price of this modish headpiece he informed me was six

guineas, adding, by way of apology, that human hair was now fetching three guineas an ounce.

‘And, pray, where do you get this human hair?’ I asked.

‘That, sir, is one of the secrets of the trade. We import from Germany, sir, and we buy British hair from the public institutions of this city.’

‘From the prisons and hospitals, I suppose,’ I hazarded.

‘Well, sir, I confess Sir John Fielding and the gaoler’s shears send us many a handsome head of hair. Nor do we inquire too curiously into the origin of the article, provided the quality be unimpeachable. Let me tempt you to try that Apothecary’s Bush, sir. With a dark complexion like yours, the effect of those frizzy curls is killing.’

‘Nay, my good friend, I am but newly returned from the East, and am not yet enough in the mode to prefer the hair of some Mistress Doll Tearsheet to that with which Nature has clothed my head.’

I left the barber deprecating my want of taste, and went straight to Mr. Blade’s office, it being now close upon two o’clock.

I found the lawyer seated at his desk, with a

shabby little tin box before him. It was securely sealed with a cipher that I had seen used by Everard Lestrangle; and I thus perceived how close the intimacy had been between these two men at the time of my undoing.

Having paid Mr. Blade the stipulated five-and-twenty guineas, I broke the seal and opened the box. It contained a packet of letters written by Everard Lestrangle to Philip Hay; and these I read. I had received the owner's permission to use them against the writer; but this I had no intention to do. I desired only to obtain a yet fuller comprehension of Mr. Lestrangle's character than his iniquitous conduct to myself and Margery Hawker had already afforded me.

The letters were in great part incomprehensible to me, so lavishly did the writer employ cant phrases that seemed to constitute a kind of secret language between Philip and himself. But of that which was plain to any reader there was enough to stamp the author of these epistles as a consummate villain. Profligacy and heartlessness were revealed in every line; and when I read those portions of the correspondence in which the seducer alluded to Margery Hawker, my detestation of this man reached a

supreme degree it had not attained before. Alas, poor victim of a libertine's caprice, couldst thou have seen those lines in which he described the passion thou didst mistake for love, thy bruised heart must have broken at once! And this wretch was the husband of the pure and gentle creature I had known in the happy, unforgotten days at Hauteville! I shuddered as I thought of a union between beings so opposite. Could I marvel that my lady spent her days and nights in a round of fashionable pleasures? For her there could be no such word as home.

I looked up presently from the letters, and saw Mr. Blade staring at me with an astonished countenance, which I doubt not was warranted by my own scowling face.

'Upon my honour, sir, I should have thought you had found a nest of scorpions in that box instead of a bundle of old letters,' he said.

'There are viler things than scorpions, Mr. Blade, —the thoughts of a bad man. Do you know Mr. ————nay, Sir Everard Lestrangle?'

'I once had the pleasure to be of some service to him, sir, in a delicate transaction. My honour as a professional man forbids me to reveal——'

‘Oh, sir, I should be the last to question you upon the subject. Mr. Lestrangle did me a most foul injury some seven years ago, and I mean to have redress. Beyond this point I have no interest in him. Where is he most easily to be met?’

‘Humph! It is some time since I have been employed by him; but there are certain distinguished characters upon whom a man of the world, and the father of a family like myself, feels it a duty to keep an eye. Since Sir Everard’s return from St. Petersburg he has abandoned the onerous paths of diplomacy, and has become solely a man of pleasure. His father’s death gave him a handsome fortune; for Sir Marcus, although himself a poor man, had inherited largely from his wife, who died suddenly, leaving him a very fine estate, which now belongs to Sir Everard. He is a member of White’s, attends the debates and votes with the Ministry, but seldom or never speaks. He is said to play high, and is a hanger-on of the two patent theatres, where he may be seen paying his court to the younger and prettier of the actresses. This, sir, is what I am told of the gentleman. My own humble opportunities do not permit me to come in contact with him.’

‘I thank you for your information, sir, so far as it goes. I find here the one paper which I especially require ; and now if you please to accept ten guineas as the price of the remainder, which you can examine before parting with them, I am willing to take them.’

‘Ten guineas is really so contemptible a sum, sir.’

‘It is offered for a most contemptible commodity. If you will take the trouble to glance over those papers, you will perceive they are but the letters of a libertine written to his venal instrument. It is a correspondence between Don Juan and Sganarelle, Mr. Blade.’

‘These letters might fetch me more money from Sir Everard Lestrangle himself, sir.’

‘If you think that, you had best keep them.’

‘Say fifty pounds, sir, and the letters are yours.’

The little comedy which we had performed in the morning was now repeated, and I finally consented to give twenty guineas for the remaining contents of the case. Amongst the letters I had found two containing allusions to that villanous plot of which I had been the victim,—allusions which would hardly have been clear to a stranger, but which

must needs be sufficiently obvious to any one familiar with previous relations between myself and the writer.

‘These shall justify me in the sight of Dorothea Lestranger,’ I said to myself, ‘if I survive an encounter with her husband.’

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE TRACK OF MY ENEMY.

AFTER leaving Mr. Blade, with the certificate of Philip Hay's marriage and Sir Everard's letters safely bestowed in my pocket-book, I took a hasty dinner at a tavern not far from Little Britain. Here I lingered some time to read the papers, which were full of laudation of Mr. Pitt, that master-spirit of statecraft, who was fast doing for England what Clive had begun so gloriously for India. For years past our country had lain in a kind of stupor—inglorious and despised abroad, unprosperous at home, accepting peace at the price of fame and honour, and studying economy in that miserly spirit which is but too sure to result in ultimate loss.

Upon this scene of despondency and inaction appeared Pitt, and these peace-loving politicians found themselves bound to the chariot-wheels of the very genius of war. Already he had heated his col-

leagues and his country with the fire of his own ambition, and so moved his hearers by a noble panegyric upon King Frederick of Prussia, that an annual subsidy to this monarch of six hundred and seventy thousand pounds was voted by acclamation. This had occurred in December of the year last past, after the victories of Rossbach and Lissa had elevated the King of Prussia—whom we have since known to be a declared infidel—into our Protestant hero.

I was pleased to hear from a gentleman with whom I conversed at this tavern that the prime minister had also offered a handsome tribute to the genius of my great master, Colonel Clive, of whom he had spoken to an approving House as a ‘heaven-born general.’ Indeed, this ready recognition of merit in others seemed one of the instincts of greatness, and one possessed in an eminent degree by Pitt. Nor did he wait till a brilliant success had revealed the power that achieved it. In Wolfe he had already discerned the latent spark of heroism which was to burst into so grand a fire by-and-by at Quebec.

I left the tavern as the day was closing in, and walked westward again, moved only by the roving instinct of a stranger to the town, to whom its commonest sights are new and wonderful. The lamp-

lighters were mounting their ladders and filling the lamps from their oil-cans as I walked up Holborn Hill, jostled on every side by that eager, pushing throng of citizens, so different from the lounging populace of Muxadavad. Instead of the cry of the priests calling the faithful to prayers, I heard the shrill clamour of orange-girls, and small catchpenny traders offering their strange varieties of merchandise, to the utter hindrance and obstruction of all traffic. Instead of picturesque groups of turbaned Moors squatting in the Bengal sunshine, I saw a throng so diverse in dress and appearance that I might have fancied myself amidst a concourse of people from all the ends of the earth.

At one point the crowd bearing towards St. Sepulchre's Church was so dense that I was fairly brought to a standstill, and while waiting for the rabble to pass, inquired of a neighbour where all these people were going.

'I suppose they are going to see the execution to-morrow,' my neighbour answered civilly.

'An execution?'

'Yes; three brothers—mere lads—who are to be hung at eight to-morrow morning.'

'And it is now six in the evening. Do you mean

to tell me that this rabble will wait for fourteen hours, standing in an open street, for the brief delight of seeing three of their fellow-creatures hung?’

‘Not only this rabble, sir, but the finest gentlemen in the town. There is not a window within view of the gallows where you will not see a group of bloods, drinking and gaming. ’Tis said that Mr. Selwyn, the wit, has a suit of black on purpose for executions.’

‘And pray, sir, what is the crime of these unfortunates? Is it murder, arson, or forgery for which they are to suffer?’

‘No, sir; the lads are somewhat to be commiserated. Their sole offence is the appropriation of three oak-saplings, which they severally cut and converted into walking-sticks while enjoying a sabbath ramble in a copse at Edgware. The law for the protection of timber is somewhat stringent.’

I had seen something of the severity of English laws before I was sent to India, but this formal sacrifice of three young lives for as many oak-saplings seemed to me more appalling than the cruelties of Suraja Doulah, which were at least the blind impulses of passion.

‘Yes,’ said my neighbour, perceiving my concern, ‘it is really a sad case, for the lads are of respectable parentage—the sons of a small yeoman—and had no idea they were committing a felony.’

‘It is of a piece with the rest I hear of this country, sir,’ I replied. ‘We frame laws that would have revolted Draco himself by their cruelty, and then regret their application. It was but last year that a body of English officers were compelled to condemn a brave man to an ignominious death, not because they thought him unworthy to live, but because the act of parliament that provided against his offence left them no alternative.’

‘Nay, sir,’ replied my neighbour; ‘Admiral Byng was the scape-goat of a party—a sacrifice to public disappointment. He could never have been so sacrificed if his judges had not been bound by the letter of a cruel law. They condemned him to death in obedience to an act of parliament, and recommended that he should be spared in deference to the common instincts of humanity. Is this right, sir? Should not law and humanity go hand in hand? Byng would have been pardoned, I doubt not, sir, had not His Majesty given his promise to the City that he would allow proceedings to take their course. He

would fain have saved the Admiral, but was bound hand and foot by that pledge.'

'What! sir,' I cried, 'could a Christian King mortgage his divinest prerogative—the right to be merciful?'

The stranger shrugged his shoulders in an evasive manner, as who should say, 'Really, sir, this is no affair of ours;' and the mob having by this time passed us, we bowed and parted.

I was glad to turn from the bustle of Holborn into the quiet of Lincoln's Inn Fields, whence I rambled on to Great Queen Street, and thence to Long Acre, staring about me as I went along with all the curiosity of a country bumpkin who surveys the town for the first time. It was but the random impulse of an idler that took me to this locality, yet no sooner was I there than it occurred to me this was a place which of all others I should visit.

It was here the milliner resided to whom Lady Barbara had desired me to address my letter—a woman of whom she had spoken as a 'good soul,' who might be trusted. She would scarce have said this of a person she was but little familiar with. I knew the intimacy that must of necessity obtain between a fine lady and her milliner, since the

despotic changes and caprices of fashion must oblige a frequent intercourse, and it suddenly struck me that from this woman I might learn some details of the last year of Lady Barbara's life.

'I can at least call upon her,' I said to myself. 'If the visit prove useless, I would take much more trouble than that for the chance of hearing the smallest tidings of that dear friend.'

I looked for the house, and after some time discovered a painted and gilded doll hanging over a doorway, and on the door below this sign an announcement to the effect that Mrs. Winbolt, mantua-maker and milliner to Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, had correspondents at Paris and Vienna, and might be relied on for the newest modes in court-robcs, sacs, cardinals, petticoats, and mantuas.

I rang the bell, and was speedily admitted by a grinning black boy, who ushered me into a small oak-parlour at the back of the house, where he set a candle upon the table and left me without a word. There was a half-open door between this and another apartment, whence I heard the animated tones of a female voice.

'Nay, indeed, madam, 'tis the very same material

I sold but last Thursday week to the Princess of Wales. She said, "I will have that, or nothing. I protest there's no living without a sac of Lyons brocade these days." And for your complexion, ma'am, which is, I need scarce say, far superior to Her Royal Highness's——'

'But the price,' remonstrated another voice; 'I had thought six guineas would have bought the finest sac you could make me, and for one of this material you have the conscience to ask ten.'

'Her Royal Highness paid twenty guineas for the same stuff, ma'am, and found her own point. With a tucker of English lace I could not do it for sixpence less than eleven guineas, and then 'tis because I would not disoblige a customer.'

'I am vastly afraid your obligingness will end in my ruin,' replied the customer with a profound sigh, and then followed a little more haggling, which resulted in an order for the garment under discussion. This conquest achieved on the part of the mantua-maker, and the lady shown to the door, the black boy condescended to inform his mistress of my presence, and she came bustling in upon me.

'Upon my word, sir, I know not how to apologize,' she exclaimed; 'that Pompey is the most incorrigible

rascal; and if he had not been given me by a lady of quality, who, I make no doubt, was heartily tired of his impish tricks, I should have turned him out of my house long ago.'

I was pleased with the appearance of Mrs. Winbolt, who was that kind of person usually described as 'a good motherly soul.' She displayed that comfortable bulk of figure which is generally supposed to accompany an easy disposition, and her complexion was as fresh as if she had been the rustic wife of some prosperous farmer.

This matronly person saluted me with a profound curtsy, and then, as she approached nearer to me, stopped suddenly short, and regarded me with a closer scrutiny than the occasion warranted. For the moment some peculiarity in my appearance seemed fairly to bewilder her; she gave a little gasp, and then began to apologize for having stared at me with apparent rudeness.

'I trust you'll be so obliging as to pardon me, sir,' she said; 'but I never saw a more startling likeness—but for the darkness of your complexion it would be perfect—and for the moment I was so foolish as to take you for a gentleman who has been dead these five-and-twenty years.'

‘You took me for my father, Mr. Roderick Ainsleigh,’ I said.

‘Good heavens, sir! are you Mr. Robert Ainsleigh, the gentleman that was sent to India?’

‘I am that ill-used person.’

Mrs. Winbolt offered me both her plump hands, and shook mine with a heartiness that almost took me aback.

‘Oh! sir, you must be so good as to excuse the liberty, but I couldn’t be better pleased than I am to see you,—unless, indeed, Lady Barbara had lived to see this day. Alas, sir, what a loss!’

She wiped some tears from her eyes with an unobtrusive gesture.

‘To me an irreparable one. ’Twas the merest hazard that brought me here; but I am very glad I came. It seems you loved my benefactress. She was something more to you than an ordinary customer?’

‘Something more than a customer? Yes, sir, indeed, she was *my* benefactress; it was her blessed nature to shower favours on all she knew. I was born on the Hauteville estate, sir. Yes, I’m a Berkshire woman; and folks tell me I keep my country looks, though I’ve had nigh thirty years’ hard work

in London. My father was a tenant-farmer in a small way ; and I used to go to the Hall sometimes to assist with the needlework when Martha Peyton had more on her hands than she could get through ; and my Lady Barbara used to see me, and talk to me. And in those days—well, sir, I'm getting an old woman, and may speak out without vanity—I was accounted something of a beauty. My good looks brought me nothing but trouble, however ; for there was a young squire—Mr. Langdon of Langdon Hill—lived within ten miles of my old home, and was always riding over to our place, and talking fine poetical stuff to me ; and I was a weak foolish girl, sir, and thought he was honest, and meant well by me. Other folks didn't think so, and their talk got to Lady Barbara's ears, and she came to me and told me what was said, and bade me, as I loved my own soul, see Mr. Langdon no more, unless he declared himself willing to make me his wife. “ If he loves you honestly, Susan,” the dear lady said, “ he will love you all the better for that honest question.” And I obeyed her, Mr. Ainsleigh ; though it was a hard thing for a poor country girl to ask such a question ; and I read my answer in my gentleman's face, though he turned it off with a careless jest,

and said 'twas early times to talk of matrimony, which was apt to be the death of love; and then muttered something about country wenches being now as cautious and mercenary as any fine lady in the town. I went to my Lady Barbara that night and told her what he had said; and I was such a foolish creature in those days that I was half heart-broken to think that my suitor could be so base. My lady saw how great a trouble it was to me, and she set to work at once to get me away from a home where I was miserable and in danger. So, as I had shown a kind of talent for mantua-making, my lady persuaded my father to send me to London, and she herself paid the money to apprentice me to a court-milliner and mantua-maker; and I came, and in a few years set up in business in a small way for myself. My lady gave me her custom, and I made all her clothes when she married Sir Marcus Lestrangle, and that was the making of me; and here I am. Heaven only knows what I might have been without my lady's kindness; for my father was an easy-going man, given to drink, and looked sharper after his pigs than he did after his children. And now, sir, that's a long story; but I've been obliged to tell you as much in order that you may under-

stand what reason I had to love Lady Barbara Lestrangle.'

'And you knew my father?'

'Yes, sir, I have seen him many a time, when I was working in my lady's dressing-room at the Hall. I helped with a tapestry-screen that Lady Barbara was doing, you see, sir; and Martha Peyton and I used to sit at work with my lady herself, and your father used to come into the room and stand over my lady's chair, talking to her as she worked. It was but few stitches she used to set at those times. Ah, sir, there were two hearts broken when your father left Hauteville; for I am sure he loved my lady as truly as she loved him. And she loved you as well as if you had been her own son, sir. I have heard her say so; for she would tell me her troubles, when she would tell them to no one else.'

'Put me out of misery by answering one question, if you have power to do so!' I exclaimed eagerly. 'Did Lady Barbara believe me the wretch I must have seemed when I disappeared from London?'

'No, sir, she would believe no ill of you. She came to me within a few days of your marriage. Sir Marcus had shown her the certificate; but she de-

clared it was a false one, and believed that some evil had befallen you. "I will swear he loves Miss Hemsley," she said to me; "and this paper has been forged to do him mischief. What motive had he to marry that wretched girl? But from a marriage with Dora he had everything to gain. Oh! there is some odious treachery at work, and the same hidden enemy who caused him to be driven from Hauteville has been since working to destroy him."

'And Miss Hemsley—did she believe me false?'

'Alas! yes, sir; that young lady did believe the story of your marriage, and upbraided herself for having stooped to let you know she had loved you. My lady was sorely grieved by this; yet you can scarce wonder it was so, for all things told against you—above all, your disappearance. You were advertised for in the *Flying Post*, and many times, at my lady's bidding; and one day she came to me in much distress of mind. "He is dead, I fear!" she exclaimed. "Were he living, I am sure he would have answered those advertisements." I told her perchance you were kept out of the way by force, as I knew what things are done in this town: this she seemed to think probable.'

‘Did she suspect Everard Lestrangle as my hidden enemy?’

‘Yes, sir, I am sure of it, though she never spoke his name. “He has one bitter enemy,” she said; “my poor boy has one unscrupulous, relentless foe.” And then she told me how she had been to Mr. Swinfen, the gentleman to whom she recommended you, but could get no tidings of you there, or at your chambers, save that you had gone out one day never to return. And so things went on; I seeing a good deal of my dear lady, who had none about her that she cared to trust. There was a French maid of Miss Hemsley’s, whom I always took for a spy, for she was ever watching and listening when I waited on my lady.’

‘Ay, she was the veriest viper,’ I cried; and thereupon told the mantua-maker Ma’amselle Adolphine’s share in my undoing.

‘I thought as much, sir. That French hussy was in the pay of Mr. Lestrangle. She used to watch me as a cat watches a mouse; yet I don’t think she ever got much good from her watching. One day came your letter from the Indies; but my lady was at that time in Paris with her husband, and I was obliged to trust the letter to the post, in a

cover which I myself wrote for it. Sure I am there is no reason it should miscarry ; but neither that nor another that came after it reached my lady. The family only came back to town in time for Miss Hemsley's wedding. How Sir Marcus prevailed on that young lady to marry his son, I know not, for sure I am there was no love between them ; but he did so work upon her that she at last consented. There was a very fine wedding, and I was employed to make the wedding-clothes, as I had been for my lady's. It was a week after the wedding that your last letter came. Lady Barbara was now in town, and I carried it to her with my own hands, and would give it into none but hers. Oh ! sir, I never shall forget her face when she read how you had been treated. " Oh, what a villain !" she cried, starting up from her chair, with the letter crushed in her hand ; " but he shall suffer for his baseness ; suffer in that kind of loss which alone can touch his sordid soul." 'Twas this she said, or words very near this ; for there are some scenes that take a hold upon one's memory, you see, sir, and it would not be easy for me to forget this. And then she told me what had happened to you. " He shall come back triumphant," she said ; " yes, I will have him

brought back to confront that scoundrel;" and then she sighed and exclaimed, "Alas, poor Dora! what a fate for thee! and my arm could not shield thy helplessness!" and so she went on, in a wild random way, as if she had been alone. Next day she came to my house in her chair, and told me she wished to draw-up a paper, upon some business matter, and did not care to do it at home. "One might as well live upon the stage of Covent Garden Theatre as in a fine house full of servants," she said; and I knew but too well she was watched. And then she asked me if I knew of any decent lawyer who could write out the paper she wanted. So I sent for old Mr. Solly, a respectable attorney in King Street, who had drawn up the lease of this house for me, and sometimes sued a customer for me that hung back from paying. He came immediately; and my lady and he were shut in this very parlour for nigh upon an hour, at the end of which time Mr. Solly opened the door and called me. "I want you to witness Lady Barbara Lestrangle's signature to this paper, Mrs. Winbolt," he said; "there is no occasion for you to know what the paper contains; you have only to attest my lady's signature." On this my lady signed the paper, and then laid her hand upon it and said

this was her will and testament. I signed after her, and Mr. Solly put his name below mine.'

'Can I see this Mr. Solly?' I asked eagerly, for I shrewdly suspected that my own interests were involved in this paper.

'Alas! no, sir; he lies in the burying-ground by Drury Lane. He was near seventy years of age, and was carried off by a fever last midsummer twelve-month.'

'Has he left any son or successor likely to be familiar with his business?'

'No, sir; he was an old bachelor. The business passed to a stranger, Mr. Compit.'

Hopeless as it might seem, to think of obtaining information from such a source, I resolved to see Mr. Compit next morning. But, before bidding my kindly mantua-maker good-night, I had more questions to ask her.

'How long before her death did you see my benefactress?' I inquired.

'Never again, sir, after the day she signed the paper; it was but three weeks after that she died. I shall never forget with what a shock the news came upon me. She had been to Hauteville for a fortnight, and came back to St. James's Square to preside

at an assembly given in honour of Miss Hemaley's marriage. Her death was awfully sudden.'

'Mr. Lestrangle and his bride appear to have been with her?'

'Yes, sir. 'Twas after a grand dinner given in honour of them that the sad event happened. I had the account from the housekeeper in St. James's Square. 'Twas just when the visitors had left, and my lady had gone into a little room behind the drawing-room with Mrs. Lestrangle, when she gave a sudden cry, and the blood gushed from her lips. Sir Marcus and his son both ran to her, and bells were rung and doctors sent for; my lady's own maid, that French viper Adolphine, and the housekeeper, all came with their different nostrums; but it was all of no use; she lived but to speak a few words.'

'Oh, Mrs. Winbolt,' I exclaimed, 'what would I not give to know those last words!'

'Ay, sir, she may perchance have spoken of you in that final moment. I know she loved you dear.'

'And that wretch Adolphine was still with Mrs. Lestrangle? It would seem my lady had not told of her treachery.'

'No, sir, I do not think my lady told your story to

Mrs. Lestrangle; it would have been but to make her wretched. And I believe Lady Barbara had it in her mind to bring you home, so that you might appear suddenly, as one risen from the dead, to confound your enemy.'

'God grant I may yet so appear to his confusion!'

I answered.

After some further conversation of an unimportant nature, I bade Mrs. Winbolt good-night, and left Long Acre, very grateful to that Providence which had conducted me thither by what had seemed hazard.

After careful consideration of all that Mrs. Winbolt had told me, I arrived at the conviction that the document executed by Lady Barbara in the mantua-maker's parlour was a will in my favour. Was not this implied in her declaration that she would punish Everard Lestrangle in the sole manner his sordid nature could feel? How more surely could she punish him than by depriving him of the wealth which he had doubtless hoped my disgrace must needs assure to him?

I went early the next morning to Mr. Compit; but that gentleman could give me no help. The transaction in which his predecessor had been engaged

with Lady Barbara Lestrangle was of a nature too trifling to leave any record, unless it might have been some private entry in Mr. Solly's memorandum-book; and of such personal property Mr. Compit possessed none.

'If Lady Barbara Lestrangle had been a regular client of my predecessor's, it would be another matter,' he told me; 'but, you see, the occurrence was a mere casualty, on which Mr. Solly would scarce be likely to bestow a second thought.'

'Yet the rank of the client and the peculiar circumstances of the case might surely have made some impression upon him?'

'Tis like enough they did, but not such an impression as would embody itself in documentary evidence. Mr. Solly was not the man to communicate his sentiments in relation to a business matter; he was an excellent lawyer, and as silent as the grave. If the lady wanted secrecy, she could not have employed a better man.'

This was all. I left Mr. Compit's office no better informed than when I entered it.

From thence I went to the Temple, where I was so fortunate as to find Mr. Swinfen at home. He received me with much kindness, and made me re-

late my Indian adventures. I was surprised to discover how little was known in England of those stirring events in the East, save the names of the potentates we had been concerned with, and the battles we had fought. Pitt's laudation of Clive had alone been equal to the occasion ; and indeed I think this great statesman was the only man in England who perceived the grandeur of that theatre now opening for British enterprise and British valour on the far shores of the Indian Ocean.

Having satisfied Mr. Swinfen with a full account of my public adventures abroad, I proceeded to relate my strange meeting with my father ; a piece of news that was most surprising to him ; and after that my conversation with Mrs. Winbolt of Long Acre.

‘ And you think the paper drawn up by this Mr. Solly was a will in your favour ? ’ asked Mr. Swinfen, when I had finished.

‘ I do, sir. The fancy may seem presumptuous, but it is founded on many small circumstances that, to my mind, make a chain of evidence almost conclusive.’

‘ And you would insinuate that such a document has been suppressed or destroyed by Sir Everard Lestrangle ? ’

‘That, sir, is my suspicion. I know Everard Le-strange to be capable of any villanous act. Lady Barbara was at Hauteville a week before her death ; she was not cold in her coffin when her own private apartment was broken in upon, and the cabinet where she kept her papers—not her jewels, mark you, sir ; those I know to have been kept elsewhere—ransacked and destroyed by masked ruffians. A common burglary, you will say, which by a mere coincidence of time happened within twenty-four hours of the lady’s death. But would burglars choose this room for their point of attack, and content themselves with rifling a Japan cabinet, when the plate-room of Hauteville is known to contain that kind of treasure which alone burglars covet ?’

‘Your argument is plausible,’ replied Mr. Swinfen thoughtfully ; ‘but it is hard to suspect a gentleman of so vile a deed.’

‘Have I not suffered the vilest usage at that *gentleman’s* hands, sir ? Is there any act so base that I should hesitate to believe him capable of it ? But I will not press this subject upon you ; I am bent on investigating the matter in some sort, though little good can come of any discovery I may make. Lady Barbara’s will is doubtless destroyed ; and to

prove that such a paper ever existed is perhaps a task beyond human ingenuity.'

After leaving Mr. Swinfen's office, I felt that my business in London was for the time concluded. Eager as I might be for a meeting with Everard Lestrangle, I wished to make myself, as far as possible, master of his secret before meeting him. And I was now free to revisit that spot which I had seen so often in my dreams, and to which my thoughts had ever turned with inexpressible fondness. I went straight from the Temple to the coach-office where I had alighted on first arriving in London, and booked my place for Warborough, in the Bath coach, which stopped to change horses and refresh its passengers in that small market-town.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OLD PLACE AND THE OLD FOLK.

THE Bath coach left London at dusk, and travelled all night, much to the terror of its passengers, who regarded the passage of Hounslow Heath as a period of imminent peril. Yet I think a dark narrow road in a wooded country is infinitely more appalling than a wide open landscape, such as Hounslow or Bagshot; across which, on moonlit nights, one may see a scudding hare at half a mile's distance, and where at all times the sound of horse's hoofs travels far to warn the ear of an approaching foe. Hounslow and Bagshot have, however, the stamp of fashion; and I suppose it is as much the mode for a knight of the road to assail his prey upon these particular spots, as for a gentleman to air his long-skirted coat in the Ring.

The coach deposited me at Warborough before daybreak; and while breakfasting in the coffee-room

of the 'George' by a good fire, I had leisure to consider how I should approach Hauteville. I was not certain of one friend in the home of my childhood and youth, and knew not whether I should be permitted to cross the threshold of the mansion, or sit once more beside the familiar hearth of the warren's lodge.

'Yes,' I said to myself after a long debate, 'it is to the instinct of my foster-mother I will trust. However she may have heard me maligned, I doubt not I shall soften her. There must be a subtle power in affection that will prove stronger than lies or treachery. Yes, I will go straight to her whose tenderness sheltered my childhood, and I know *she* will not refuse to believe the truth spoken by her foster-son.'

With this resolve I set out for Hauteville, and just as the sun brightened over the landscape with the promise of a glorious day, I crossed the little rustic stile which marked the boundary of the estate, and entered Hauteville woods.

Oh, how bitter and how sweet, how new and how old, how strange and how familiar, the scene was to me! Here all seemed unchanged. On the face of Nature time had set no mark; but those who had

made the place dear were dead or estranged from me, and it was with a stifled sob that I paused to look around.

The walk from Warborough to Hauteville was a long one ; and I knew that before I could arrive at the warrener's lodge honest Jack Hawker would in all probability have set out on his daily round. This was what I wanted. It was upon my foster-mother's affection I relied, and I meant to make my appeal to her alone. I had occasion to pass within sight of the house ; the shattered windows looked blank and dismal as when my childish eyes had first beheld them. The same air of desolation hung over the place, and instead of that careful neatness of gardens and parterres which I remembered so well in my boyhood, there was an air of neglect and actual disorder that astonished me. I concluded that Sir Everard and Lady Lestrangle came seldom to their country mansion. I turned from the scene with a sigh, and continued my journey at a quicker pace.

The blue smoke from the warrener's lodge was curling cheerily upward from among the newly-budding trees, ever so faintly tinged with a tint of tender green. Here at least there was life ; here something much more like home than was to be

found in yonder stately dreary pile, which Vanbrugh had improved away from its original gothic splendour. My heart beat fast as I hurried along the path which little Margery and I had so often trodden hand in hand.

‘Dear child! Her image came back to me, not as I had seen it in the hour of my enthrallment by a base plotter, but in the gentle innocence of childhood, fair as the face of an angel.

The outward aspect of Jack Hawker’s cottage had changed in no particular since I last looked on it. The latticed windows twinkled in the morning sun, the chickens pecked invisible nourishment from the short dewy grass, and close at hand sounded the comfortable grunt of satisfied English pigs. The door was fastened only by the latch with which my hand had been of old so familiar. I paused for a minute ere I crossed the threshold, and the next moment was standing face to face with my foster-mother.

She had just emerged from the dairy, carrying a dish of butter. This she set down hastily, startled by the entrance of one she took for a stranger. I was standing with my back to the light, and my seven years’ apprenticeship under an Indian sky had

doubtless wrought some change in me. However slight this change may have been, my foster-mother took me for a foreign pedlar.

‘Nay, sir,’ she said, with a furtive glance of apprehension towards a certain walnut-wood box, in which I had of old known her to keep the family treasure of plate—six teaspoons, a battered caudle-cup, and a monstrous silver watch—‘I am but a hard-working countrywoman, that never wore lace in her life, and have no need of your smuggled foreign stuffs. At the great house you might find a customer; were my lady at home; but she has not been there this year-past, nor is likely to be there for as long to come.’

‘What! Mrs. Hawker,’ I said reproachfully, ‘your eyes are bright enough yet, but it seems to me they will not help your memory to recall an old friend.’

She looked at me for a moment, and then clapped her hands together with a shrill cry.

‘Why, Robin,’ she exclaimed, ‘how brown thou art grown!’

‘Mother,’ I said, ‘I left this place an outcast. Did you believe me guilty of that foul wrong for which Sir Marcus drove me out?’

She hung her head as she answered me;—

‘Yes, Robin, at first I half-inclined to think my-

darling's ruin must needs be your work; I knew she loved you. How *he* lured her from her home I know not to this hour; but I have long known it was no act of yours.'

'Yet whence should come my justification, mother, if not from your own heart?'

'It came from hers. A year after she left us, there came a woman to me one morning, while my husband was in the woods, to say I was to call next day—market-day—at the "George," at Warborough, where there was one who wanted to see me. It was not strange that I guessed at once 'twas something to do with Margery, for my lost child was never out of my thoughts. I questioned the woman, but she would tell me nothing. I was to go to the "George," and ask for the person who wished to see Mrs. Hawker. This was all. Oh, Robin, thou art a man, and knowest not what a mother's heart can suffer! I thought the time would never pass. I lay awake all night, praying that I might hear of my child; and next day, setting out on the journey, I felt like one distraught. The house was scarce up when I went to the "George," and I had to wait a chambermaid's leisure before I was taken upstairs to a sitting-room, where the shutters were

still shut. While the woman was opening them, a figure wrapped in a white gown came out of a room adjoining. "O God, it is my child!" I cried; and the words were scarce spoken when Margery was sobbing in my arms. I stayed with her all day, Robin. There was no stall of mine set in the market that day, and I had to sell my butter and honey, at a dead loss, to a chapwoman in the town. We were together all day, my child and I; but she would tell me scarce anything, save that we had done thee wrong, and that an enemy had hatched a wicked plot to bring about thy ruin. "'Twas no act or word of his that tempted me from my home, mother," she said. Yet when I pressed her to tell the villain's name, she would not. "You must ask me no questions, mother, as you love me," she said. "I was mad to trust myself here, but I could not live a day longer without seeing you. I am rich enough to go where I please." And she swore there was no shame in the money, Robin; it was all won by her own honest labour. She lived alone, with but few friends, and had neither lover nor suitor. She had sinned and suffered and repented: those were her very words, Robin. I begged her hard to tell me where she lived, and how; but she

would not. "I am lost in the great wilderness of London, mother," she said; "but there is not an hour in which I sit alone that my thoughts do not fly back to my old home and hover around those I love. Would they were guardian spirits to protect and shelter you!" She pressed money upon me, but that I refused; and it was but to stop her tears that I consented to take a locket from her neck.'

'And have you never seen her since, mother?'

'Yes, Robin, often. The same woman brings me her message, and we meet in the same room three or four times in the year, and I know my child loves me. Yet I dare not speak her name to her father, unless I could tell him she was coming home to us; and that she will not do. And so we go on, Robin. I know nothing of my child except that she loves me.'

'And you have never been to London to look for her?'

My foster-mother regarded me with a wondering smile. It was as if I had asked her whether she had been to Hindostan.

'I was never in London in my life, Robin, nor my husband either, and I know not a creature in that great city.'

‘ Shall I search for Margery ? ’ I asked.

‘ Ah, Robin, if thou wouldst ! ’ cried she, clasping her hands.

‘ Who has a better right than I ? Did I not ever love her as a brother should love his sister ? She was made the unconseious instrument in a vile plot against me ; but that is cleared up now, and there is no cloud between us. I will seek her, mother ; and, if it is possible, I, who was accused of luring her away, will bring her back to you.’

And now I entreated my foster-mother to tell me all she knew of that strange event which had happened at the Hall on the night after Lady Barbara’s death, and how it had fared with my old friend Anthony Grimshaw since that time.

‘ Alas, poor soul ! ’ she exclaimed, ‘ he lives, and that is all can be said. His poor wits have gone for ever, the doctor says ; and yet there are times when he knows people, and for a few minutes together will be quite rational. I doubt he might mend if he lived a different life, amongst cheerful sights and sounds, and with people that would talk to him ; but to be mewed up for ever with Martha Grimshaw is enough to drive sane folks mad.’

‘ Faith, I have reason to know that. Mrs. Grim-

shaw is the very genius of gloom ; and these last seven years have not improved her, I suppose ?’

‘Nay, Robin ; she has changed for the worse since you left ; and yet she goes more than ever to the chapel in Brewer’s Yard. It is not often I go to the great house, but I never see her that she does not sigh and groan as if a corpse were in the next chamber.’

‘Poor Tony !’

‘Ay, poor soul ! ’tis a dreary life for him. He sits moping by the fire ; and were it not for the comfort of his pipe, I doubt he would have been dead long ago. ’Tis his sole companion and friend.’

‘Were the scoundrels who made the attack ever brought to justice ?’ I asked.

‘No, Robin ; they were never so much as seen in the county.’

‘And they were known for no foul work before or after ?’

‘Never that Jack or I could hear of. No men answering to the description have been caught by the thief-takers since that time.’

‘Were no means taken to discover the wretches ?’

‘Sir Marcus sent two men down from London—

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This was all my father-in-law could tell
I had hoped to confirm my suspicions of
it was intended to see Anthony Gribble
at his home, back to London;
of his old friends, promising to see
him very soon.

I had been in London by train
in the last of the year.

[Faint, illegible handwriting]

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...the ...

first, because I must have owned to having seen the child; and next, because to tell him as much would have been to set him looking for the wretch that really did the mischief. If my good man suspected Sir Everard Lestrangle was the scoundrel—I think he is, Robin—he would not sleep another night under this roof; and I love my home, dear. My child was born in this house. It would be a kind of death to leave it. And, after all, we know not for certain that it was Sir Everard stole our girl away from us.’

I could but smile sadly at the woman’s reasoning. She was the fondest, tenderest creature I had ever known; yet the finer sense of honour, which the rugged man had, was wanting in the softer woman.

‘Tell my foster-father nothing till I bring his daughter home to him with a name which is honestly hers,’ I said; and left the cottage without waiting to be questioned.

I reflected that, as the widow of Mr. Hay, a soldier slain in Bengal, my foster-sister might return to her home without shame or scandal. It must needs be easy enough to prove a marriage performed no more than seven years ago; and I resolved to visit Paris myself, in order to obtain due

evidence of the fact. It was only by making this first marriage a certainty that I could assure myself from the hazard of any legal entanglement arising out of the second.

Grimly dreary—splendid as it had seemed to me when I first entered it—appeared Hauteville Hall on this the occasion of my revisiting it after a lapse of years. A strange maid-servant admitted me at a small iron-clamped door that had been used by the Grimshaws and myself during the long absence of the family. I was conducted across the great hall—where the banners looked dingier and more ragged than of old to eyes that had so lately beheld the blaze of Indian standards beneath an Indian sun—along the same passages by which I had first reached Mrs. Grimshaw's dreary sanctum, and so to the door of the sanctum itself, which the woman opened softly and admitted me.

'A gentleman from London to speak with Mrs. Grimshaw on business,' she solemnly announced in my own words, and retired, closing the door behind her, leaving me face to face with my old enemy, who dropped the book she had been reading, and started up from her chair, staring at me with a ghastly face.

My tutor was dozing in an arm-chair close to the fire, with a handkerchief over his face. My heart yearned to this kind friend in his affliction, and it was to him I should at once have addressed myself, had not his wife's awful looks arrested me by a kind of magnetic power.

‘Robert Ainsleigh!’ she cried.

‘Yes, madam,’ I answered, ‘and I am pleased that you at last deign to call me by my right name. During my absence from this place I have met one who was witness to my mother’s wedding, and am thus able to tell you I never deserved that opprobrious title you were wont to bestow upon me.’

‘Indeed, sir; I am glad to hear Miss Lester was not the base creature folks believed her when she ran away from her home to take up with your father.’

‘It is the misfortune of the generous and impulsive to invite the censure of the malevolent, madam,’ I replied. ‘My mother has passed to a world where her actions will happily meet a more tender judgment than they received on earth.’

‘May I ask what business brings you to Sir Everard Lestrangle’s house after these many years? I was not aware that you and he were on terms of friendship, however you may stand with his lady.’

This was said with a little spiteful shiver. The woman had an inordinate capacity for hatred, and her manner told me that even gentle Dorothea was not exempt from her ill-will.

‘I come to see a very old friend, Mrs. Grimshaw,’ I replied; ‘one for whose kindness I had reason to be grateful at a period when I had sore need of friendship.’

‘My husband is in no condition to profit by your civility, sir,’ replied the pitiless creature; ‘he knows no one—not even his wife.’

‘It will be a melancholy satisfaction to me to see him, notwithstanding, madam; and with your leave I will wait till Mr. Grimshaw awakens.’

I seated myself without invitation, and Mrs. Grimshaw resumed her lecture. A glance at the cover of the pamphlet in her hand showed me that it was one of George Whitefield’s innumerable sermons.

‘And that woman will account herself justified by faith,’ I said to myself, ‘as if she, who has not one Christian thought or impulse, can with the heart acknowledge Christ. O miserable lip-service!’

For about a quarter of an hour we sat in silence—a silence broken only by the slow ticking of the

eight-day clock, the heavy breathing of the sleeper, and the falling of the light wood-ashes on the hearth. The fire was the only comfortable thing in the room.

The striking of the clock awoke my old friend. He pushed the handkerchief from his face with a tremulous hand, and looked around him like a child that is newly awakened. Great Heaven, how changed was that wan white face from the intelligent countenance I had known so well ! It was like a mask moulded from the dead, rather than the visage of the living.

‘My pipe, mother,’ he said, stretching his hand towards his wife without looking at her.

Mrs. Grimshaw filled a clay pipe that lay beside a jar of tobacco on a table near the old man’s chair, and handed it to him, assisting him submissively while he lighted it.

‘It is but in such vile creature-comforts the benighted soul can find pleasure,’ she said, by way of commentary on this small act of charity. ‘The bread of life hath no power to nourish or console him. It is in vain that I read the inspired pages of Mr. Whitefield, or the learned discourses of the late holy Venn. He doth but stare at me with a blank unmeaning gaze. And you will have observed

that he calls me "mother." He has by some strange hazard forgotten his later life, and takes me for his mother, who departed to the rest of the pious nigh forty years ago. The mind is quite gone you see, Mr. Ainsleigh.'

No, not quite. At the sound of that familiar name there came a faint flicker of the lamp which Mrs. Grimshaw thought to be for ever extinguished.

'Ainsleigh,' muttered the old steward, 'Ainsleigh! Roderick Ainsleigh—a wayward lad—proud, but generous; and I think he loved me. Yes, I am sure he loved me. Poor lad! Dead, they tell me. Yet who should be master of Hauteville, if not he? There is no one else; I say there is no one else.'

It seemed as if these broken sentences struck terror to the mind of Martha Grimshaw. She hastened to the old man, and did her best to stop his talking.

''Tis your coming has sent him into this fever,' she cried angrily; 'he is not fit to be seen by strangers, and cannot bear to see them.'

'Strangers! yes, madam, he may be loath to see strangers; but I am no stranger. I am one who loves him—one whom, I dare venture to say, he loved.—Come, dear sir,' I said, going to my old friend and kneeling down beside his chair, sorely

against the will of his wife, who lacked only the strength to keep me off by main force, and wanted not the will to be violent; 'come, sir, look at one who has ever loved you; your friend, your pupil—not Roderick, but Robert Ainsleigh!'

The old steward gazed upon me with a fixed countenance, but the transient gleam of intelligence that had lighted it a few moments before was gone; it was a blank.

'Dear sir, do you not remember me?'

'Is it likely he should remember you, when he does not know his own wife?' Mrs. Grimshaw demanded with a sneer.

I was still kneeling at my old friend's feet, gazing curiously into his face, with his cold wasted hand clasped in mine. Alas, I could neither warm that feeble hand into the genial glow of health, nor awaken one thrill of memory in that frozen brain!

While I thus watched him, the old man suddenly rose from his chair and tottered with feeble steps towards the door.

'Come, come,' he said in a confidential whisper; 'I promised—come, all is safe. I promised to take care. An old man, my lady, but a faithful servant. Come.'

He beckoned to his wife, and then laid his hand, as if mechanically, upon my arm, and drew me, by no means unwillingly, along with him. In this manner we left the room, and walked along the narrow passage, and through the deserted chambers in which I had lived in the brief period of my gentility. Heavens, how ghastly they looked! with all their splendour shrouded by holland draperies, and only a glimpse of the chill March sunlight creeping in here and there through a hole in a shutter. Mrs. Grimshaw followed us closely, with a countenance that expressed at once impatience, anger, fear, contempt—a very conflict of passions.

My old tutor led me to the foot of the grand staircase and upward to a room that I remembered with a pang of unspeakable bitterness, a tenderness that was anguish—that last worst agony the Italian tells of in his catalogue of hell's various tortures—the memory of departed happiness. It was my Lady Barbara's morning-room before the door of which my tutor stopped.

'It is a madness with him to come to this room, where he met with the accident that lost him his wits,' said Mrs. Grimshaw; 'he will come here every day, sometimes twice a day. The Lord has been

pleased to afflict him grievously in punishment of his sins.'

'Nay, madam, I doubt if it were a question of punishment for sin, my old friend might have kept his wits till others I know of had lost theirs. I do not believe in that nice scale of earthly reward and punishment, that debtor-and-creditor account with the Almighty, which some folks pretend to keep. It has pleased God to afflict a good and harmless old man in this instance, as He hath often chastised the innocent in days gone by, for some wise purpose of his own.'

Mr. Grimshaw rattled the handle of the door impatiently.

'Open, open !' he cried ; and his wife, with a most unwilling air, took a key from her pocket and unlocked the door.

'It is but to encourage his madness to let him come here,' she said ; 'and you, sir, who can have no business here, and whose presence in this house would, I am sure, be displeasing to my master, Sir Everard Lestrage, will oblige me by leaving me alone with my husband. It can be no pleasure to me that he should exhibit his infirmities to curious eyes, and I know not at whose invitation you came hither.'

‘At no invitation, Mrs. Grimshaw. I come to a house in which I have been grievously wronged.’ My looks were fixed on her countenance as I said this, and I saw her blench. ‘And I come chiefly to see this one old friend; secondly, because I believe this house hides the secret of a great wrong done to me.’

At this her countenance grew livid, and from this moment I was sure that whatever evil had been done in my absence, this harridan was in the secret of it. For the minute my random words had a crushing effect upon her, and she made no further attempt to prevent my entrance into the chamber where I first heard the story of my birth, seated at the feet of my benefactress. The room had a disused air, and, except in the one instance of the ebony cabinet, which had disappeared from a recess by the fireplace, there was nothing changed since I had last beheld the apartment. I was very curious to see what purpose, or what fragmentary memory of some past duty, had brought my tutor to this room, and I stood apart observing him in silence.

He walked slowly round the room, looking at every article of furniture with an inquiring gaze, as if he would have demanded of each inanimate object what

it was that he sought. Sometimes he came to a dead stop, shaking his head with a strange helpless gesture; then with a faint sigh walked on, and thus completed his round.

‘Something missing,’ he muttered at last. ‘An old man, my lady, but a faithful servant. Yet there is something missing. What, what, what, what?’

No words can describe the piteousness of his tone as he reiterated this last monosyllable.

‘It must be the Indian cabinet he misses!’ I exclaimed.

‘Likely enough,’ replied Mrs. Grimshaw, with a carelessness which I felt sure was but assumed. ‘He had a childish fancy for taking charge of this room—the odds and ends of old china, and books, and such-like; and the thought of it worries him now his poor wits have gone.’

‘There must surely have been something of peculiar importance in this room,’ said I; ‘my old friend was too sensible to perform a duty that might have been better discharged by a housemaid. He must have had some solemn charge in this room, or the broken memory would scarce prey upon his mind as it does.’

I watched Mrs. Grimshaw as I spoke, and I saw that every word was a homethrust. Yes, there had been a plot, and the outrage committed in this room was a part of it. It had been a plot against me, and this woman was concerned in it, or privy to it. But what advantage was it to me to know this? and what more than this was I ever likely to discover?

'Twas strange that nothing was ever heard of the villains who misused your husband, madam,' I said.

'Yes, sir, it was very strange.'

'Did his master, Sir Marcus, take no pains to avenge so faithful a servant?'

'Sir Marcus did his duty to my husband, sir. All was done that could be done.'

'And who were the doctors that preserved my old friend's life, and yet failed to restore his reason?'

'My husband had the attendance of two doctors, sir; Mr. Harris of Rerton Green, and Mr. Claypole of Warborough.'

'What! two country surgeons only? Were no eminent men brought down from London to pronounce upon his state?'

'He had every care, sir, and constant prayers. Mr. Whitefield himself prayed for him by name during a blessed visit to Warborough.'

‘And these prayers were to avail instead of medical science! Why, woman, this is a kind of murder, to let the lamp of reason go out for want of a judicious breath to coax back the flame.’

‘I cannot argue with a blasphemer, sir; Elisha went up into his chamber, where the child of the Shunammite woman lay dead, and “shut the door upon them twain and prayed unto the Lord.”’

‘Elisha lived in the childhood of this earth, when man was still an infant at the knees of his Creator. The age of miracles is past, and, instead of His own divine interposition, the Almighty has given us science. He has taught us to be ourselves the miracle-workers; but you bundle away the gift in a napkin, and think to save yourself cheaply and easily by prayer.’

‘I do not ask your advice, sir, as to the treatment of my husband, and I am fully satisfied with what was done for him.’

‘Ay, madam, I doubt not it suited you that he should lose his wits. There may be secrets in this house that could scarce be kept hidden while so honest a man had his senses.’

Again I saw that every word went home. And now, having little more motive for remaining in this

house, since my old friend gave me no token of recognition, I wished Mrs. Grimshaw good-day, and left her, I felt sure, furious and bewildered, not knowing how much, and certainly in nowise suspecting how little, I knew of the evil doings with which she was acquainted.

END OF VOL. II.

